

# **INTRODUCTION TO THE EXEGESIS OF THE QUR'ĀN**

**By**  
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In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious the Most Merciful

## FOREWORD

The Qur'ān is God's last and final message to humanity, a message that is intended to instruct them on how best to conduct their personal and communal lives in a way that is pleasing to God, and thus conducive to their happiness in this life and the life to come. It is therefore a message whose words are meant to be understood, constantly pondered upon, and closely followed. As carriers of a divine message, the Qur'ānic words and expressions must thus of necessity convey objective meanings, by which I simply mean meanings which are independent of the ideas, whims, prejudices and other subjective tendencies of individual human beings. To safeguard against a subjective interpretation of the Qur'ān, and to help students of this divine book to understand the true message which its words convey, Muslim scholars have developed a whole science of Qur'ānic hermeneutics. What is most impressive about this science is that scholars have succeeded in proving that the rules laid down in it for the exegesis of the Qur'ān are not invented by them, but are either stated in some way in the Book itself or are implied by some of its statements. Ibn Taymīyah is among our best writers on this subject, and this little book of his is perhaps the best first introduction to it that we have.

We have a project of giving the English speaking students of Islam, Muslims in particular, the chance of

availing themselves of the wealth of some basic Arabic works of some of our great Sunni scholars by presenting them in good English translation, and have chosen this important book to be the first in that project.

It is not difficult nowadays to find scholars who have good knowledge of both English and classical Arabic. But for a good translation of the books that we have in mind, more than that this is needed. A competent translator of works like those of Ibn Taymiyah and great 'Ulamā' like him, must add to a good knowledge of these two languages, a good understanding of the Islamic Sciences, of their special Arabic terminology, and of the suitable corresponding English terminology. Scholars like these are not easy to come by, but we have been fortunate in having in professor Aṅsari almost all the qualifications needed for shouldering such a burden. May Allah reward him for the effort that he has made in carrying out this noble task.

Comments and suggestions by our readers of this and the forthcoming works are welcome and appreciated.

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## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

This "Introduction to The Exegesis Of The Qur'ān" is by Shaykh al-Islām Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Taymīyah (661/1262-728/1327), one of the most erudite personalities of Islam, an outstanding scholar of the Qur'ān and Sunnah, a great expounder of Islamic ideas, and a profound critic of all those alien concepts and practices that have entered into the body of Islam.

Ibn Taymīyah discusses how to understand and interpret the Qur'ān, how to use the commentaries written on it, how to know what is the right and proper exposition of the Qur'ānic verses, and how to know what is not.

The first thing that he suggests one should do is to refer to the Qur'ān itself. For the Qur'ān often refers to a thing briefly at one place and then elaborates upon it at another; it discusses one aspect of a subject on one occasion and another aspect on another occasion. By referring, therefore, to the relevant passage at different places, one will have a clear understanding of its verses, and a complete view of its themes.

The second thing one should do is to refer to the expositions of the prophet, may peace and blessings of God be upon him. For he was commanded not only to communicate the words of the Qur'ān but also to explain their meaning. Since he performed this task

under God's guidance, his expositions are authoritative.

Thirdly, one should refer to the elucidations of the Companions of the Prophet. They understood the Qur'ān better than anyone else; for they witnessed its revelation, knew the circumstances in which its verses were revealed, and learned their meaning directly from the Prophet. The most knowledgeable among them with regard to the Qur'ān are, of course, the closest associates of the Prophet, the first four Caliphs, and then the two outstanding scholars, 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd (d. 32/656) and 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās (d. 68/687).

Fourthly, one should refer to the exegesis presented by the next two generations, the Successors (*al-Tābi'in*) and their successors (*Tab' al-Tābi'in*). As Ibn Taymīyah says, their expositions have not been influenced by foreign ideas, nor have they been affected by political and theological disputes that marred the exegesis of later generations, and are, to be sure, the best and the purest expositions in spirit and letter of the Qur'ān. However, their expositions carry authority only when they are all in agreement. Where they differ, no one view is binding over and above another or for that matter binding over the following generations.

Ibn Taymīyah is fully aware that if one follows this course one will come across differences between the Elders (*al-Salaf*). But these differences are not real, or, as he puts it, are differences of variation (*tanawwu'*) rather than of contradiction (*taḍādd*). Broadly speaking, there are four kinds of differences. One is of expression, as for example, (i) When, one of the Elders explains 'the straight path' (*al-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm*) as the Qur'ān, or obedience to the Qur'ān,

and another characterizes it as Islām. The second difference is one of illustration, when, for example, someone explains the three categories of Muslims (in verse 35:32) as the wrong-doers (*al-zālim li nafsi-hī*), the average performer of religious duties (*al-muqtaṣid*), and the most obedient (*al-sābiq*) in terms of some act of obedience: prayer, charity, good behaviour and the like. One may, therefore, say that the *zālim* is one who at times offers obligatory prayers, and at times not; the *muqtaṣid* is one who offers them regularly; and the *sābiq* is one who, over and above the obligatory prayers, offers also the supererogatory ones. The third difference occurs when a word has, say, two meanings and the text can admit them both; here one person may prefer one meaning and another the other. The fourth kind of difference arises from the fact that there are very few words that can convey precisely the meaning of another word. It is only natural that people will differ in their choice of the most appropriate word in their translations.

Ibn Taymīyah mentions two additional differences which one is likely to find in the exegetical material that has come down from the Elders. One arises from the Israelite sources which some Companions began to use in their elucidation of Qur'ānic references, particularly when a number of Israelite books were found after the battle of Yarmuk (13 A.H./634 A.D.). The key figures in the transmission of the Israelite material are ka'b al-Aḥbār (d.32/652), Wahb ibn Munabbah (d.110/728) and Muḥammad ibn Ishāq (d.150/767). This material, Ibn Taymīyah says, is of three kinds. The first is contradicted by our own traditions, and must be rejected; the second is supported by our own traditions, and may be utilized;

and the third is neither supported nor contradicted by our traditions. They can be quoted without approval or disapproval. This material has, moreover, a very limited utility: it is not at all necessary for our understanding of the verses which deal with the important matters of belief and practice. At the most they are helpful in case of historical narratives. But here, too, many of the details which they offer are of little significance. For example, we are not going to gain much if we are told what was the size of the Arc of Noah, or what was the colour of the dog which the People of the Cave had.

Another difference concerns our own traditions. It may be noted that only a part of our traditions concerning exegesis (*tafsīr*) are *musnad*; that is, have come down from the Prophet. Of these, there are, of course, many that are *mutawātir*, that is, reported in so many ways that their authenticity becomes absolutely certain. However, the majority of the traditions are one-man report (*khabar al-wāhid*). Of them, those which have been accepted and approved by the scholars of the *Ummah* are definitive. However, most of the exegetical traditions are *mursal*, that is, reported by a Successor (*Ṭā'bi'ī*) directly from the Prophet. As a rule, exegetical traditions have not been scrutinized as much as the other traditions. Consequently, a number of weak even fabricated traditions have found place in various commentaries on the Qur'ān. This is the case particularly with the traditions concerning merits of the *sūrah*s and the verses produced, for example, by al-Tha'labī (d. 427/1036), al-Wāhidī (d.468/2075) and al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1043) in their commentaries. However, it is by no means difficult to find out which traditions are authentic and



which are weak or fabricated. The scholars of *ḥadīth* have written much on the subject and have provided us with enough help.

The real differences in *tafsīr* arose after the first three generations of the Elders had passed, when people had taken positions on political and theological issues, and had worked out their doctrines in the light of their reasoning and with the help of Greek logic and philosophy. Their knowledge of the Qur'ān and the Sunnah was inadequate, and they paid little regard to the expositions of the Elders. Consequently, they at times contradicted one *ḥadīth* or the other, and came out with fantastic-interpretations.

Ibn Taymīyah condemns exclusively a rational interpretation of the Qur'ān (*tafsīr bi l-rāy*) so strongly that many people take it as complete denial of reason in exegesis. This is not correct. The *tafsīr bi l-rāy* which Ibn Taymīyah condemn is that *tafsīr* which one carries out mainly on the basis of one's reason without fully acquainting oneself with the relevant passages of the Qur'ān, the *aḥādīth* of the Prophet and the elucidations of the Elders on the subject, or without paying due regard to them. Ibn Taymīyah does not mean that one should simply quote the traditions and the words of the Elders, and never exercise one's mind. Nor is this his own practice in the commentaries that he has written on various verses and *sūrahs* of the Qur'ān. All that he condemns so that use of reason which is not rooted in the Qur'ān, the Sunnah and the traditions of the Elders. He sees no inherent contradiction between reason and tradition. In fact, one of the basic principles of his thought is that the unclouded reason (*al-'aql al-sarīḥ*) with which God has created man supports rather than contradicts the

authentic traditions (*al-naql al-ṣaḥīḥ*) of religion. He has taken great pains to demonstrate this truth in his writings.

Ibn Taymīyah also censures the esoteric elucidations and interpretations of the Qur'ān by the mystics. Some of them have advanced ideas which may be right in themselves, but the verses from which they have inferred them do not lead themselves to their interpretation. Hence there is no justification for calling them allusions (*ishārāt*) of the Qur'ān and investing them with a pseudo-sanctity. Sufis have also presented ideas which are wrong and which have no support whatsoever in the Qur'ān. To use them in the exegesis of the Qur'ān and plead for their acceptance on the ground that they have been discovered in *kashf* or *ilhām*, vision or inspiration, is a grave mistake unless it is proved that they are supported by the Qur'ān and the Sunnah.

These are the major points which Ibn Taymīyah highlights in this Introduction. He refers to many commentators and commentaries on the Qur'ān from the earliest times to his own day, and freely offers his comments on them. The reader will discover that part of the book for himself. I am sure that he will find the ideas which Ibn Taymīyah has expounded, as well as the opinions he has expressed highly illuminating and helpful in understanding the Qur'ān.

The Arabic text of the book, *Muqaddamt al-Tafsīr* is included in the thirteenth volume of the *Fatāwā sheikh al-Islam* Ahmad Ibn Taymīyah published from Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The chapters (*fusul*) in the Arabic text produced here have been made on the pattern followed in the English translation.

In the End I must express my deep appreciation for the keen interest which Dr. Zafar Ishaque Ansari, Director of Islamic Research Institute, International Islamic University, Islamabad has taken in publishing this book. May God bless him a lot.

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## Preface

All praise is for Allah. We look for His help, pray for His forgiveness, and seek refuge in Him from our evils and misdeeds. No one can mislead whom He guides, and no one can guide whom He does not show the way. I witness that there is no god except Allah, the one without a partner. I also witness that Muḥammad is His servant and His messenger. May God bestow upon him peace and blessings!

A number of brothers have asked me to write an introduction to the exegesis of the Qur'ān, and discuss the principles which will help in understanding it. They have asked me that referring to the commentaries on the Qur'ān, I should say which of them are based on the traditions of the Elders (*salaf*) and which of them are based on rational explications, and point out which parts of them are right and which are wrong, and indicate the criterion for this distinction. For, the commentaries on the Qur'ān are full of all kinds of things, right and wrong, true and false. The truth, as we know, is either what comes down through reliable sources from the prophet who is beyond error, or a proposition which can be proved. Every thing else is either false and has to be rejected, or doubtful and cannot be ascertained whether it is true or false.

The duty of the *Ummah* is to understand the Qur'ān properly, which is "the strong rope of Allah (to hold), the message of wisdom (to believe), and the

straight path (to follow). Evil thoughts will never corrupt it, and wicked tongues will never distort it. How much you study, it will never wear out, nor shall it cease to inspire. Scholars will never be able to fathom its depths. Whoever utters it speaks the truth; whoever acts upon it shall be rewarded; whoever judges according to it does justice; whoever preaches it calls to truth; whoever turns away from it in arrogance is doomed; and whoever seeks guidance elsewhere is lost."<sup>1</sup>

Allah has said: "But if, as is sure, there comes to you guidance from me, whosoever follows My guidance will not lose his way, nor fall into misery. But whosoever turns away from My message, verily for him is a life hard and wretched, and We shall raise him up blind on the Day of Judgment. He will say: 'O my Lord! Why have you raised me up blind, while I had sight (before)?' God will say: "Thus did you, when Our signs came unto you, disregard them: so will you this day be disregarded."<sup>2</sup> And: "There has come to you from God a new light and a perspicuous Book, wherewith God guides all who seek His pleasure to ways of peace and safety, and leads them to a path that is straight."<sup>3</sup> He has also said: "Alif-Lām Rā. A book which We revealed to you, in order that you might lead mankind out of the depths of darkness into light, by the leave of your lord, to the ways of Him, the exalted in Power and Worthy of all praise, of God to Whom does belong all things in the heavens and on the earth."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This has been reported as a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet see al-Tirmidhī: *Sunan*, Thawāb al-Qur'ān, 14, and al-Dārimī: *Sunan*, faḍā'il al-Qur'ān, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Qur'ān, 20: 123-26.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 17:18.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 14: 1-2.

And: "Thus have We by Our command sent Revelation to you: you knew not before what was Revelation and what was faith; but We have made the Qur'ān a light, wherewith We guide (men) to the straight path, the way of God to whom belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. Behold (how) all things finally come to God!"<sup>5</sup>

I intend this Introduction to be brief. I will put here what comes to my mind with the grace of Allah. He alone is the guide unto truth and righteousness.

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 42: 52-53.

## Chapter One

# TAFSĪR OF THE ELDERS

The first thing to know is that the Prophet, peace be upon him, has explained the meaning of the Qur'ān to his Companions, just as he has taught its words. The Divine command: "You should explain to people what has been sent down to them,"<sup>6</sup> calls for the former just as it calls for the latter. Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī<sup>7</sup> has said that whenever the people who taught them the Qur'ān like 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān<sup>8</sup>, 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd<sup>9</sup> and others learned ten verses of the Qur'ān from the Prophet would not proceed further unless they had understood whatever ideas and regulations those verses contained. They used to say: "We learned the text of the Qur'ān and studied its ideas and injunctions all together." This explains why they spent such a long time in learning a chapter

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 16:44.

<sup>7</sup> Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān 'Abdullāh b. Ḥabīb al-Sulamī, an eminent Successor (*tābi'i*) of Kufah was a reliable transmitter of *ḥadīth* (Ibn Hajar: *Tagrīb al-Tahdhīb*, Cairo, 1380 A.H., Vol. I, p.408).

<sup>8</sup> 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān (b.573 A.C. and d.36/656), one of the four most outstanding Companions of the Prophet, and the third of the Righteous Caliphs, brought out the standard text of the Qur'ān which is in use today.

<sup>9</sup> Abū Ma'bad 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd (d.32/652), one of the earliest six to embrace Islam, was in the service of the Prophet for many years. He was the most knowledgeable Companion on the Qur'ān. 'Umar al-Fārūq, the second caliph, sent him to Kufah to teach the Qur'ān, where he also served as a Qāḍī and the Incharge of the government treasury.

(*sūrah*). Anas<sup>10</sup> has said: "We used to hold in great esteem the one who learned two *sūrahs* of the Qur'ān: *al-Baqarah* and *Āl-ʿImrān*." Ibn ʿUmar<sup>11</sup> spent many years, and, according to Mālik,<sup>12</sup> complete eight years, in learning these *sūrahs*. In fact, the Companions were submitting to the command of God: "This is a blessed Book; We have revealed it to you so that you contemplate over it,"<sup>13</sup> and "Don't they contemplate over the Qur'ān!"<sup>14</sup>, and , "Have they not pondered over (God's) words!"<sup>15</sup>.

Obviously, you cannot contemplate words unless you understand their meaning. That is why god has said: "We have revealed it as an Arabic Qur'ān so that you comprehend it"<sup>16</sup>, and to comprehend the Qur'ān means to understand its meaning.

Everyone knows that a book is meant for understanding, not just for reading. This is all the more true of the Qur'ān. No one never reads a book on a subject: medicine, mathematics or any other, without

<sup>10</sup> Anas b. Mālik (d. 93/712), one of the ten most-prolific transmitters of *ḥadīth*, entered the service of the Prophet as a young boy and was with him for ten years. He died after a full life.

<sup>11</sup> ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿUmar b. Al-Khaṭṭāb (d. ca. 74/693), one of the most outstanding younger Companions, and a learned scholar known for his piety and strict imitation of Prophetic precepts, distinguished himself as a narrator of *ḥadīth*, next only to the most prolific narrator, Abū Hurayrah.

<sup>12</sup> Mālik b. Anas b. Mālik (d.179/795), the founder of the Mālikī school of *fiqh*, was the most outstanding scholar of *ḥadīth* of Madīnah in his times. His famous collection of the prophet's *ḥadīth al-Muwaffā*, also contains the words of his Companions and the Successors, and forms the basis of the *fiqh* he developed. He also wrote a commentary on the Qur'ān: *Tafsīr Gharīb al-Qur'ān*, which is no more extant.

<sup>13</sup> *Al-Qur'ān*, 38 : 29.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 47 : 24.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 : 68.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 : 22.



trying to understand it. The same is true of the Qur'ān, on which rests our well-being and happiness, our religion and life. This is why the Companions of the Prophet differed little in their exegesis of the Qur'ān. Their Successors (al-Tābi'īn) have differed comparatively more; however their differences, as compared to those of the later generations, are negligible. As a rule, the better a generation the more profound is its knowledge and understanding the Qur'ān, and the greater is the agreement of its scholars on its exegesis. Among the Successors there were many who studied the whole Qur'ān with the Companions. For instance, Mujāhid<sup>17</sup> studied the entire Qur'ān, as he has himself said, with Ibn 'Abbās,<sup>18</sup> questioned him about each and every verse, and noted all his comments. That is why al-Thawrī<sup>19</sup> has said: "If you get the comments of Mujāhid it is enough." This

<sup>17</sup> Mujāhid ibn Jubayr al-Makkī (21/642 – 104/722) was the most eminent student of the Great Commentator of the Qur'ān, 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās. His Commentary on the Qur'ān, *Tafsīr Mujāhid* has been published with notes by 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Tāhir Muḥammad al-Sūraṭī (Majma' al-Buḥūth, Islamabad, Pakistan) in two volumes.

<sup>18</sup> "Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās (d. 68/687), is one of the two most eminent scholars of the Qur'ān amongst the Companions known as 'the Commentator of the Qur'ān', the fourth most prolific narrator of ḥadīth, and a distinguished faqīh. His comments on the Qur'ān form part of all the commentaries on the Qur'ān. However, many comments attributed to him are not genuine. The so-called Commentary of Ibn 'Abbās compiled by Abū Tāhir Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Firozābādī is not his work. (See al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa l-Mufasssīrīn* Cairo, Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadīthah, 1396/1967, pp.188-89).

<sup>19</sup> Abū 'Abdullāh Sufyān b. Masrūq al-Thawrī (97/716 – 161/778) called the '*amīr al-mu'minīn fī l-ḥadīth*' was born and brought up at Kufah, refused to accept *qaḍā'*, the post of judge offered by Manṣūr, left Kufah in 144/761, and lived in Makkah and Madīnah. Among his books are two collections of ḥadīth, one large and one small.

also explains why al-Shāfi'ī,<sup>20</sup> al-Bukhārī<sup>21</sup> and various other scholars, as well as Imām Aḥmad<sup>22</sup> who have commented on the Qur'ān quote the words of Mujāhid more than the words of any one else. The point I am stressing is that the Successors learned the exegesis (*tafsīr*) of the Qur'ān from the Companions as they learned the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet from them. This is not at all to deny that they exercised their minds on different verses and expressed their opinions, as they did with regard to various *aḥādīth* of the Prophet.

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<sup>20</sup> 'Abdullāh Muḥammad b. Idrīs b. Al-'Abbās al Shāfi'ī (150/767 – 204/819) was born in Syria, brought-up and educated at Makkah, studied *fiqh* with Imām Mālik at Madīnah and Imām Muḥammad in Irāq, and settled in Egypt in 199/814 where he developed his own school of *fiqh*. His *Risālah* is an exposition of the basic principles of his juristic school and underlines the importance of *ḥadīth* in *fiqh*, while his *al-Umm* incorporates his legal views in detail. Among his books, there is one mentioned under the title: *Aḥkām al-Qu'ān*, al-Zarkālī, *al-A'lām*, Vol. VI, p.250).

<sup>21</sup> Abū Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl b. Ibrāhīm al-Bukhārī (194/809 256/870) is the most outstanding compiler of *ḥadīth*. His *Ṣaḥīḥ*, the most authentic collection of *ḥadīth*, contains 2602 *aḥādīth*; his other works include a smaller collection of *ḥadīth*, *al-Adab al-Mufrad*, and a great biographical work on the transmitters of *ḥadīth*, *al-Tārikh al-Kabīr*. There is a long section in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* on the *tafsīr* of the Qur'ān.

<sup>22</sup> Imām Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ḥanbal (164/781-241/855) born at Marwa, brought up in Baghdad, devoted himself to the study and collection of *ḥadīth* since 179/795; laid down the foundation of a separate school of *fiqh*; expounded and defended the views of the Elders (*salaf*) on basic issues of the faith. His *Musnad* is the greatest collection of *ḥadīth* containing more than thirty thousand *ḥadīth* and reports. His work on the Qur'ān includes a book on *tafsīr* and another on *al-Nāsikh wa-Mansūkh*.

## Chapter Two

# DIFFERENCES IN TAFSĪR (EXEGESIS) BETWEEN THE ELDERS (ANCESTORS)

The Elders (*Sālf*) have differed little in *tafsīr*; they have differed more in matters of practical rules (*ahkām*) than in matters of *tafsīr*. Moreover, their differences are differences of variation rather than contradiction, and are broadly of two types.

### The First Type of Difference

We have the first type when they express one and the same idea in two languages such that one of them brings out one aspect of the idea, and the other aspect; even, though both refer to the same thing. These explanations are like alternative names which lie between synonyms and antonyms. Examples are the various names for the sword such as *al-sārim*, the sharp, and *al-muhannad*, the one made of the best steel of India, or the various names for God, the Prophet and the Qur'ān. All Divine names refer to one and the same Being; that is why to call Him by one name is not against calling Him by another name. This truth has been mentioned by God Himself: "Call Him Allah or call Him *āl-Rahmān*; by whatever name you call Him (it is well): for to Him belong all beautiful names".<sup>23</sup> Every name of God refers to His essence as well as to the attribute which it signifies. For instance,

<sup>23</sup> Al-Qur'ān. 17 : 1-10.

*al-'Alīm*, the Knowing refers to His essence and His knowledge; *al-Qadīr*, the powerful refers to His essence and His power; *al-Raḥīm*, the Merciful refers to His essence and His mercy. Hence, those who, on the ground that they are following the letter of the text, deny that God's name refer to His attributes commit a mistake similar to one committed by the Qarāmatah,<sup>24</sup> the extremists among the Esoterics (*al-Bāṭinīyah*) who say that one can neither assert that God is Living nor that He is not-Living. They negate both the contraries. To be sure, they do not deny the names which are no more than mere signs such as pronouns. But they do deny the names which have a positive meaning. Those whose views agree with theirs in this respect, notwithstanding their claim that they are strict literatists, are one with the extreme esoteric in this matter. However, space does not allow me to expand further upon the point.<sup>25</sup> What I want to underline is

<sup>24</sup> Those groups are called *Bāṭinīyah*; they seek the esoteric meaning (*bāṭin*) of the Qur'ān as against its commonly understood meaning. In this context, the term refers to the Ismā'īlīyah sect of the Shī'ahs who separated from Imānīyah when they put up Ismā'il instead of Mūsa as the seventh imām after their father Ja'far al-Šādiq, the sixth imām. Today, the Ismā'ilīs are found in South and Central Africa, Syria, India and Pakistan. Together with other Shī'ah sects they believe in the doctrine of *imāmat*: that the imām is infallible, that he is the right interpreter of the faith and *Shar'*, that belief in him is necessary for salvation in the hereafter, and that the last imām who has gone into hiding, will appear at the end of the world as the Mahdī and will establish the reign of faith and peace. The *Qarāmatah* are the extremists of this sect, and have caused havoc and destruction in the Islamic world.

<sup>25</sup> Ibn Taymīyah has referred to the views of the people who deny any positive meaning to the attributes of God, and refuted them in many of his writings, at times briefly such as in *al-Risālah al-Tadmurīyah* (Imām Muḥammad ibn Sa'ūd Islamic University, Riyadh, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1403 A.H. pp. 41-44), and at times in detail such as in the tract, *Tafsīl al-Ijmāl fī mā yajib li Allāh min Sifāt al-Kamāl* (*Majmū' al-Rasā'il wa l-Masā'il*. Pub. Rashīd Ridā Cairo, n.d.' vol. V, pp. 38-79).

that every name of God refers to His essence as well as to the attribute which it signifies. It also refers, by implication, to the attributes signified by other names.

This is true of the names of Prophet such as *Muhammad*, the Praised; *al-Hāshir*, the Gatherer, and *al-'Āqib*, the last (Prophet). And it is also true of the names of the Qur'ān like *al-Qur'ān*, the Recited; *al-Furqān*, the Divider between the true and the false; *al-Hudā*, the Guide; *al-Shifā'*, the Cure; *al-Bayān*, the Clear Statement, and *al-Kitāb*, the Book, etc.

If you want to find out an object, we may refer to it by different names, provided the object is not unknown to you, no matter whether it is a proper name or an attribute. If, for instance, you ask what is meant by *dhikrī*, my *dhikr* in the verse; "One who turns away from My *dhikr*..."<sup>26</sup> we may say that it is the Qur'ān, or what God has revealed in His books. For *dhikr* is a verbal noun which is joined either with a subject or an object. Now, if the *dhikr* of Allah is taken in the second sense, it would mean the words which one says in remembering God such as *Subhān Allāh*, (Glory be to God!), *Al-ḥamd li-Allāh* (Praise be to God!), *Lā ilāha illa Allāh* (There is no god except Allah.) and *Allāh Akbār*, (Allah is great.). But if it is taken in the first sense, it would mean what God has said, that is, His words. And this is what is meant in the verse; "One who turns away from My *dhikr*..." For, just before it He has said: "But if, as is sure, there comes to you guidance from Me, whosoever follows My guidance will not lose his way, nor fall into misery"<sup>27</sup>, and His guidance is the words He has revealed. Similarly, following this verse He has quoted the

<sup>26</sup> *Al-Qur'ān*, 20 : 124.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 : 123.

words of the unbelievers: "O my Lord! Why have. You raised me up blind, while I had sight (before)?" and replied: "Thus did you, when Our words came to you, disregard them."<sup>28</sup> In short, what I mean to say is that *dhikr* is either the revealed words of God, or the words by which a servant remembers the Lord. Hence, no matter whether you take 'My *dhikr*', to mean 'My Book' or 'My words' or 'My guidance', etc., all refer to one and the same thing.

But if one wants to know the attribute which a name connotes it is not enough to mention the object named; one has to say something more. For instance, if one enquires about the names: *al-Quddūs*, the Holy; *al-Salām*, the Peace; or *al-Mu'min*, the Guardian<sup>29</sup>, knowing very well that they all refer to Allah, one wants to know what it means to say that He is *Quddūs*, *Salām* and *Mu'min* etc.

Now, if this point is clear, let me say that the Elders often mention an object by a name which refers to the object even though it points to an attribute of the object not implied in its other name. They may say, for instance, that Ahmad (which is the name of the Prophet) is *al-Hāshir* (the Gatherer), *al-Māhī* (the Destroyer), *al-Āqib* (the Last). Or they may say that *al-Quddūs*, the Holy, is *al-Ghafūr al-Raḥīm*, the Forgiver the Merciful. It is obvious that these names refer to one and the same being, even though one means one thing, and the other means another. This is clearly not a case of contradiction as some people think.

Another instance is what the Elders have said about *al-ṣirāt al-mustaqīm*, the straight path. Some

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 125 – 26.

<sup>29</sup> These names of God occur in the verse 59 : 23 of the Qur'ān:

have explained it by saying that it is the Qur'ān, that is to say, obedience to the Qur'ān. They have said this in light of the words of the Prophet reported through a number of transitory channels by al-Tirmidhī and Abu Nu'āym that the Qur'ān is 'the strong rope of God', 'the message of wisdom', and 'the straight path'.<sup>30</sup> Others have said that it is Islam. They have said this in the light of another *ḥadīth* of the Prophet which has been reported by al-Tirmidhī and others through al-Nawās ibn Sam'ān:

"God has set forth the following as a parable: There is a road which leads straight to the destination. On either side of the road there is a wall in which there are open doors with curtains hanging on them. From the remote end of the road, a voice calls: 'Proceed straight and don't turn to any side.' Whenever someone intends to lift the curtain from a door another voice calls from above: 'Beware! Don't lift the curtain, otherwise you will be lured inside. The Prophet explained the parable saying that 'the straight path' is Islam; the walls are the limits (*ḥudūd*) of God (which He has placed on actions); the open doors are the things that he has prohibited; the voice which calls from the end of the road is the Qur'ān; and the voice which calls from above is God's monitor in the heart of every believer."<sup>31</sup>

In fact, these two characteristics of 'the straight path' are one; for to follow Islam is nothing but to obey the Qur'ān. But, on the other hand, it is true that each means something which is not meant by the other. The word *ṣirāṭ* likewise signifies a third thing. The same is true of all the other elucidations of the Elders that the straight path is *al-Sunnah wa l-*

<sup>30</sup> For reference see note 1.

<sup>31</sup> Aḥmad : *Musnad*, Vol. IV : 182-83; al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, adab, 76.

*Jamā'ah*; or the way of *'ubūdīyah*, worship and obedience; or obedience to God and His Messenger, etc. All of them have pointed to the same thing, even though they have described it in terms of one or the other of its attributes.<sup>32</sup>

## The Second Type of Difference

We have the second type of variation when the Elders, while explaining general term, mention one or the other of its kind by way of illustration, and draw the attention of their listeners to its species, instead of offering a definition in terms of its genus and differentia. If a non-Arab were to ask them what is *khubz*, bread, they might show a *raghīf*, a flat load of bread, and say: "This is it." Obviously what they mean is things of that kind, rather than the loaf of bread which they show.

An example of this type of difference in *tafsīr* is what has been said about the verse: "Then We gave the Book for inheritance to such of our servants as We chose. But there are among them those who wrong themselves (*al-zālim li nafsi-hi*), and those who are average in doing their duties (*al-muqtaṣid*) and some who are by God's leave the foremost (*al-sābiq*) in good deeds."<sup>33</sup> We know that *al-zālim li nafsi-hi* refers to those who neglect their obligatory duties and

<sup>32</sup> See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm* Maktabat al-Ma'ārif, Riyadh, 1405/1984 Vol. 1, pp. 27-28. *al-Sunnah wa l-Jamā'ah* literally means to believe in the ḥadīth of the Prophet, follow his sunnah and stick to the party, (*jamā'ah*) of the Muslims. As a term, it refers to Sunnis in general as distinguished from the Shī'ahs, practically, the Sunnis other than the Mu'tazilah, the Khawārij and other such sects who differ from the rest of the Sunnis on some major issues.

<sup>33</sup> *Al-Qur'ān*, 35 : 32.



commit what has been forbidden. Similarly, the *muqtaṣid* means those who perform their duties and abstain from the forbidden; and the *sābiq* means those who go beyond others in seeking the pleasure of God by doing supererogatory things over and above the obligatory. Hence, the *muqtaṣid* are 'the people of the right hand' and the *sābiq* are 'the most near and dear to God'.<sup>34</sup>

The Elders have explained this point with reference to one or the other act of obedience to God. One has said: "The *sābiq* is the one who offers prayers at the earliest time; the *muqtaṣid* is the one who offers them late, but in time, and the *zālim* is the one who defers, for instance, the evening prayer till the sun turns pale." Another has said that God has described all the categories of men: the *sābiq*, the *muqtaṣid* and the *zālim li nafsi-hi* towards the end of the surah *al-Baqarah* where He has mentioned the *muḥsin* or the generous who spend money in charity; the *'ādil* or the just who trade; and *zālim* or the unjust who charge interest. People are either generous in matters of money, unjust or just. The *sābiq* are the generous ones who give money in charity over and above meeting their obligations; the *zālim* are those who take interest or fail to pay *zakāh*; and the *muqtaṣid* are those who pay *zakāh* as well as refrain from taking interest. And so on.

These explanations which mention one of the many things that the verse implies are meant to tell the listener that the verse refers to that thing as well as directs his attention to the objects of that kind. For the description of a thing through an example helps to

<sup>34</sup> This is a reference to the Qur'ānic verse, 56 : 8 and 10.

understand it much more easily than its description through a definition. Our reason comprehends an idea more quickly when someone points to one of its particular instances. We understand what is bread, for instance, more easily when somebody shows a loaf and says: "this is bread".

### Statements Regarding Revelatory Background

To this category the statements regarding the revelatory background of the Qur'ānic verses belong also, particularly the ones which say that a certain verse was revealed in the case of this or that person as we find in the discussions on the causes of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) in various commentaries. It has been said, for instance, that the verse of *zihār*<sup>35</sup> came down in the case of the wife of Thābit ibn Qays ibn Shammās; the verse of *li'ān*<sup>36</sup> was revealed in the case of 'Uwaymir al-'Ajlānī or Hilāl ibn Umayyah; the verse on *Kalālah*<sup>37</sup> came down in the case of Jābir ibn 'Abdullāh; the verse: "Judge in their disputes according to what God has revealed"<sup>38</sup> came down in the case of Banī Qurayzah and Banī al-Nadīr; the verse: "Whoever turns his back that day..."<sup>39</sup> was revealed at the time of Badr; the verse: "The witness on your (transactions) when death approaches you..."<sup>40</sup> was revealed in the case of Tamīm al-Dārī and 'Adī ibn Baddā; and the verse "Do not throw yourself with your own hands in the pit of

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<sup>35</sup> *Al-Qur'ān*, 58 : 1-4.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 : 6-9.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 : 176.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 : 51.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 : 15.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 : 106.

destruction”<sup>41</sup> was revealed in the case of the Anṣār as noted by Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī.<sup>42</sup> There are numerous statements of this kind asserting that a verse came down in the case of a certain group of pagans of Makkah, or a group of the Faithfuls. Those who made these statements never thought that the verses applied only to those groups which they had mentioned and not to others. No reasonable person, Muslim or non-Muslim will ever say that.

People have of course, differed in their opinion as to whether or not a statement which we make in general terms in a particular case should be limited to that case. But no Islamic scholar has ever held that a general statement of the Qur'ān and the Sunnah should be limited to the person concerned. The most that might be said is that it should be limited to the persons of his category; that is to say, it should apply to persons similar to him without generalizing its application as the language permits. A legal verse which enjoins or forbids, revealed though it may be in a particular case, applies to that case as well as to other similar cases. Likewise, a verse which applauds or condemns someone applies to that person as well as to all other persons like him.

The knowledge of the circumstances calling for a verse helps to understand the verse; for the knowledge of the cause helps to know the effect. That is why those jurists are right who say that in case of a vower whose intention is unknown the judgement will be made on the cause of the vow and the factors leading

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 : 195.

<sup>42</sup> Khālīd b. Zayd b. Kulayb b. Tha'labah Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī (d.52/672) later on moved to Syria and settled there. Al-Bukhārī and Muslim have recorded some 155 *aḥādīth* reported by him.

to it. In fact, the saying: "The verse A was revealed in the case of B" means sometimes that A was revealed in the case of B, and sometimes that B is one of the cases which are covered by the verse A, even though it may not be the cause which prompted A's revelation. That is to say, A applies to cases which are similar to B.

Scholars have different opinions regarding the saying of a Companion that verse A was revealed in the case of B. Should that be taken as a *musnad ḥadīth* (i.e. emerging from the Prophet) and treated like a saying in which he mentions the reason why a verse was revealed? Or should it be treated as an explanation (*tafsīr*) offered by him, but not as a *musnad ḥadīth*? Al-Bukhārī takes it as a *musnad ḥadīth*; but others do not. And most collections of *aḥādīth* under the title *Musnad* like the *Musnad* of Imām Ahmad and others take the latter line. However, If a Companion describes the event following which a verse was revealed, everyone would take it as a *musnad ḥadīth*. Once you grasp this point you will not find any contradiction between the saying of a Companion that A was revealed in the case of B, and the saying of another companion that it was revealed in the case of C, providing the verse covers both the cases, B and C, as we have explained before. If one of them mentions one cause for the revelation of a verse, and another mentions another cause, both may be true. For it is possible that the verse was revealed after the two events had happened, or that it was revealed twice, once after one event, and the second time after the other event.

These two differences in *tafsīr* which we have mentioned and which are due to variation sometimes in the names and attributes, and sometimes in the

forms and types of the things mentioned as illustration predominate the *tafsīr* of the Elders. It is these variations which people call differences.

### The Third Type of Difference

Another difference which we find in their *tafsīr* concerns words which can mean two different things: either because the words are equivocal, such as *qas-warrah* which means an archer as well as a lion, or '*as'asa* which means both the advent and the departure of night; or because they denote two different species of a genus or two different members of a class, while only one is, in fact, intended. An instance is the concealed pronominal subject in the verse: "Then (he) approached and came near, and was at a distance of but two bow-lengths or even nearer",<sup>43</sup> or the words like *al-fajr*, *wa l-shaf wa l-watr*, *wa layāl-in 'ashr*<sup>44</sup> etc. In such cases it is sometimes possible that all that the Elders have said in the *tafsīr* of a verse is true; but at another time, it may not be true. The first is the case if the verse has been revealed twice, once meaning one thing, and the other time meaning another, or if the word is equivocal and possibly means both things. This has been upheld by most of the scholars of the Mālikī, Shāfi'ī and Ḥanabalī schools, as well as many theologians. In the other case, namely the case of the word which may refer to two quite different things in the same class, the word would be taken in its general connotation if there is nothing to specify it. But if the word admits both meanings, it will belong to the second category.

<sup>43</sup> *Al-Qur'ān*, 53 : 8-9.

<sup>44</sup> They are the first three verses of the surah *al-Fajr* (89):  
By the Break of the Day (*al-Fajr*);  
By the Nights twice five (*Layāl-in 'ashr*);  
By the Even and Odd (*al-Shaf' wa l-Watr*).

## The Fourth Type of Difference

In order to express an idea, the Elders have often used words which are very close in their connotation but which are not synonymous. This has been unfortunately considered as a difference of opinion. It has not been realized that there are very few words in the language which are synonymous; in the Qur'ān they are rare, almost non-existent. It is very difficult to find a word which conveys all the meanings which are conveyed by another word; at best, it will be an approximation. This is one of the reasons why the Qur'ān is inimitable. In the verse "On the day when the firmament will be in swift commotion (*mawr*)"<sup>45</sup>, for example, if you explain the word *mawr* by *ḥarakah*, movement, this would be an approximation; for *mawr* means a light and a swift movement. Similarly, if you say *waḥy*, revelation, is *i'lām*, communication, or paraphrase *awḥaynā* (We revealed) as *anzalnā* (We sent it down); or say that '*qaḍaynā* to the children of Israel' means '*a'lamnā* (informed) them', all these will only be approximations, rather than giving the real meanings. For, *waḥy* means swift and secret communication, while *qaḍā ilayhim* is a special form of information implying the sense of *irsāl*, sending down, as well as *iyha*, revealing.<sup>46</sup>

Arabs often attach to a verb the sense of another verb by using the preposition that goes along with the latter. This means that those who think that one preposition may replace another preposition are mistaken. They say that *ilā* (to) in the verse, "He has undoubtedly wronged you in demanding your (single)

<sup>45</sup> *Al-Qur'ān*, 52 : 9.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 : 4.

ewe to (*ilā*) his flock"<sup>47</sup>, or in the verse, "who will be my helper to (*idā*) God", stands for *ma'a*, with, and means in the latter verse 'with God'. The right view is that of the grammarians of the Basrah school who say that this is case of implication. The demand for the ewe implies its taking and adding to (*ilā*) his own ewes.<sup>48</sup>

Similarly, the verse: "They intended to tempt you away from ('*an*) what We had revealed to you"<sup>49</sup> implies the sense that 'they tried to mislead you and remove you from'; and the verse, "We have helped him from (*min*) the people who believed our signs"<sup>50</sup> implies the sense, 'We saved and rescued him from'; and the verse, "A fountain which the devotees of God would drink with (*bī*)"<sup>51</sup> Implies the sense that they would be satisfied with it (*yarwā bihā*), and so on.

If you say that 'there is no *rayb*'<sup>52</sup> means that 'there is no *shakk* (doubt)', you are giving an approximate meaning. For *rayb* has also the sense of unrest and commotion, as we have in a *ḥadīth*: "Turn away from what troubles (*urībū*) you, and choose what does not."<sup>53</sup> The other instance is the *ḥadīth* which says that "the Prophet passed by a deer who was standing with his head dropped down between his legs, and said: 'Nobody disturbs (*urībū*) it.'"<sup>54</sup> As *yaqīn* (conviction) involves the sense of peace and

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 38 : 24.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 : 52.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 : 73.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 : 77.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 76 : 6.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 : 1.

<sup>53</sup> al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*; qiyāmah : 60; al-Nasa'ī, *Sunan* : quḍāt : 11; Aḥmad, *Musnad*, III : 153; al-Dārimī *Sunan* : buyū' : 2 : Al-Bukhari has quoted it as the word of Hasan b. Ali Sinan al-Bari See Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari*, 4:234.

<sup>54</sup> Al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan*, 5 : 183; Mālik, *al-Muwaffā*, 1 : 351.

satisfaction, *rayb* involves the opposite sense of anxiety. But *shakk* does not convey this sense, even though some people think that it does.

Similarly, when *dhālik al-Kitāb*<sup>55</sup> (that Book) is said to mean *hādhā al-Qur'ān* (this Qur'ān) it is only an approximation. For, even though both the expressions point to the same thing, the near demonstrative '*hādhā*' which refers to something present is different from the distant demonstrative '*dhālik*' which refers to something absent. Moreover, the word *al-Kitāb* which means something written and closed implies what is not implied in the word *al-Qur'ān* which means something recited, perceptible and open. These distinctions are there in the Qur'ān. If someone explains the word *tubsal*<sup>56</sup> as *tuhbas* (jailed), and another explains it as *turtahan* (bailed) or the like, it would not be a difference of contradiction, even though the one who is jailed is sometimes bailed and sometimes not. These expressions, as we have said, are only approximations to the real meaning. If these explanations of the Elders are collected it would be very helpful. As a collection they are sure to be far more useful and instructive than one or two solitary instance.

This does not, of course mean that the Elders had no differences. They had differences in their *tafsīr* as they had differences in practical rules (*aḥkām*). But we know nonetheless that most of the things required in ordinary life are known to every one, the laity and the elite, and have come down to us from one generation to another. For example, the number of daily prayers, their *rak'ahs* and timings; the objects and their

<sup>55</sup> *al-Qur'ān*, 2 : 2.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 : 70.



minimum amount (*niṣāb*) on which *zakāh* is levied; the fixing of the month of Ramadān for fasting; the circumambulation of the ka'bah; standing in prayer (*wuqūf*) at 'Arafāt; stoning the Satans in Minā and the places (*mawāqīt*) from which one has to put on the *iḥrām*, etc.

The differences between the Companions in matters of inheritance such as the share of the grandfather and the brothers, or of the full brothers along with the consanguine and the uterine brothers, and the like do not affect the validity of most of the rules regarding inheritance commonly needed in life. For example, the rules about the shares of the father and his ascendants, the son and his descendants, the brothers and the sisters of those who have no parents or children, and the wives. God has revealed three clear verses regarding the distribution of inheritance: In one, He has mentioned the shares of the ascendants and the descendants; in the second, He has mentioned relatives such as spouses and the children of the stepmother whose shares He has fixed; and in the third, He has mentioned those marginal relatives who inherit in virtue of their consanguinity such as full brothers of brothers from the fathers.<sup>57</sup> Cases in which the grandfather and the brothers are to jointly share in the inheritance are very rare. This is why no case of this kind came up until after the Prophet's death.

Differences in opinion may arise as a result of many factors: either the text is not clear, or one has not attended to it properly, or has not been aware of it, or has misunderstood it, or has been swayed by an opposite belief. This is just to mention a few causes; a detailed discussion can not be taken up here.

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 4

### Chapter Three

## DIFFERENCES IN TAFSĪR BASED ON TRADITION

The differences in *tafsīr* are of two kinds: those which are entirely based on tradition, and those which are known by other means. For, knowledge lies either in an authentic tradition or a valid deduction. And the tradition either originates from an infallible authority or a fallible one.

O the traditions whether they originate from an infallible authority or a fallible one, there are those about which it is possible to ascertain whether they are authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*, or weak (*da'īf*); and there are others about which we cannot ascertain this much. Of the latter kind of traditions whose authenticity cannot be ascertained, the majority are of no use, and need not be discussed here. But those whose authenticity the *Ummah* must know carry with them signs by which we can ascertain their truth. Examples of the first kind of traditions which are useless, and of which there is no way to know the truth are many. For instance, the traditions concerning the colour of the dog that the People of the Cave<sup>58</sup> had; the part of the cow with which Moses hit the dead;<sup>59</sup> the size of the Arc of

<sup>58</sup> For the People of the Cave see the *Qur'ān*, 18 : 9-26.

<sup>59</sup> For details see the comments on the verse 2 : 73 in Ibn Kathīr : *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, Vol. 1, p. 112.

Noah and the kind of wood it was made of,<sup>60</sup> and the name of the boy whom Khidr killed,<sup>61</sup> etc.

Since there is no way to know the truth about such things except tradition, only those traditions can be believed to yield knowledge which have come down from the Prophet, peace be upon him, through authentic channels. One such tradition is that which says that the name of the person with whom Moses visited was Khidr. The authenticity of this tradition is well known.<sup>62</sup> But other traditions which have originated from the People of the Book and have been reported by Ka'b, Wahab, Muḥammad ibn Ishāq<sup>63</sup> and others who took them from the People of the Book, are not to be approved nor falsified unless there is some ground to do so. It has been reported through reliable sources that the Prophet said: "If the People of the Book narrate something don't say that it is true or that it is false. For you may falsify something which is true or certify something which is false."<sup>64</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Some traditions about the Arc of Noah have also been mentioned by Ibn Kathir in his *Tafsīr* under the verse 11 : 37, Vol. II, pp. 444-45.

<sup>61</sup> See al-Tabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 15, p. 185.

<sup>62</sup> Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*: tafsīr, surah *Kahf*. See also Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari* 1:137

<sup>63</sup> Abū Ishāq Ka'b b. Mani' al-Himyarī, commonly known as Ka'b al-Aḥbār, originally a Jew from Yaman, embraced Islam at the time of 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, and settled down at Ḥims in Syria where he died in 32/652. He is the most prolific narrator of Israelite traditions. Abū 'Abdullāh Wahb b. Munabbah, originally from Khurāsān, is an honest and reliable transmitter of *ḥadīth*. He has also narrated a lot of Israelite traditions, and is credited with a book on the history of the kings of Ḥimyar. He died in 110/728.

The third important figure in the transmission of Israelite traditions is Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Ishāq b. Yasār al-Makhramī. He also wrote a biography (*sīrah*) of the Prophet; He died in 150/767.

<sup>64</sup> The words of the *ḥadīth* in the *Musnad* of Imām Aḥmad (Vol. IV : 136) are as follows: (See on next page).....

The same rule applies to the traditions which have come down from some Successors even though they have not mentioned that they took them from the People of the Book. And if the traditions which they have reported differ among themselves, the word of one successor has no authority over and above the other. However, what has come down in this field from the Companions is more reliable than what has come down from the Successors. For there is a possibility that a Companion may have heard the thing from the Prophet or from another companion who heard it directly from him. Moreover, the Companions have narrated far less from the people of the Book than the Successors. Therefore, when any one Companion reports something with confidence, we would not say that he took it from the People of the Book. For he has been forbidden to testify to their traditions.

The point I am trying to make is that to find out the truth out of divergent traditions where there is no way to ascertain the truth, and where the citation of different opinions does not avail, is like finding out the truth about a *ḥadīth* which does not have anything to prove its authenticity.

The other traditions about which we can ascertain whether they are true or false concern things, thanks God, that matter in life. There are, for instance, traditions in the books of *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth* and military expeditions (*maghāzī*) about our Prophet and other prophets which are false because they are contradicted

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....(contd from previous page)

“When the People of the Book narrate something. You should not say that it is true, or that it is false. You should rather say: We believe in Allah, His Books and His prophets. Hence, if what they say is true, you would not be falsifying it, and if it is false, you would not be verifying it.”

by authentic traditions. This is, however, not something peculiar with traditions; we also face this problem in matters that are known through other means. What I want to say, however, is that the traditions which are important for religion have some properties by which we can differentiate the true from the false among them.

We know that traditions regarding *tafsīr* are no better than traditions regarding wars and expeditions. That is why Imām Ahmad has said: "Traditions regarding three things: *tafsīr*, military expeditions (*maghāzī*) and wars (*malāhim*) have no isnād." (That is to say, they have not come down from Prophet through reliable channels.) The other version of Imām Ahmad's saying is that they have no basis (*aṣl*), that is to say, they have no *isnād*. For most of those traditions are *mursal*: that is, they are traditions which a Successor reports directly from the Prophet omitting the link of the companion in between. The reports of 'Urwah ibn Zubayr, al-Sha'bī, al-Zuhri, Musā ibn 'Aqbah<sup>65</sup> and others who came after them like Yahyā

<sup>65</sup> Abū 'Abdullah 'Urwah b. Zubayr b. Al-'Awwām al Asadī (d.94/712) is regarded as the first man to write on the life of the Prophet.

Abū 'Amr 'Āmīr b. Sharahbīl al-Sha'bī (d. 109/727), poet, faqīh and the Qāḍī of Kufah was a very eminent scholar of *ḥadīth*.

Muḥammad b. Muslim b. 'Abdullāh b. Shihāb al-Zuhri (51/671 – 125/742), a man of extraordinary memory, and the most outstanding scholar of *ḥadīth* among the Successors was the first to compile *ḥadīth*. He also wrote a book on the life of the Prophet which has recently been published.

Musā b. 'Aqbah b. Abī 'Ayāsh al-Asadī (d. 141/758) was born at Madinah and died there. He wrote on the military expeditions (*maghāzī*) of the Prophet. Scholars have held his work in great esteem.

Muḥammad b. Ishāq b. Yasār (d.150/767) is known for his work on  
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ibn Sa'ī al-Umawī, al-Walīd ibn Muslim, a-Wāqidī<sup>66</sup> and various others who have written on *maghāzī* fall into this category.

The most knowledgeable people on *maghāzī* are the people of Madīnah, then of Syria, and then of Irāq. The people of Madīnah knew them best because things happened there; and the people of Syria participated in expeditions and jihād, consequently, they had the knowledge of jihād and campaigns which others did not have. This is the reason why people esteem greatly the book of Ishāq al-Fizārī<sup>67</sup> on the subject and consider al-Awzā'ī<sup>68</sup> to be more knowledgeable in the field than scholars of other places.

As for *tafsīr*, the most knowledgeable people in this field are the Makkans. For they are the students of Ibn 'Abbās like Mujāhid, 'Atā ibn Ribāh, 'Ikramah, the client of Ibn 'Abbās, Tāwūs, Abū l-Sha'thā, Sa'īd

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the life of the prophet, which was compiled and edited by 'Abd al-Malik ibn Hishām (d.213/823); and is the most authentic earliest work on the subject. An English translation of it has been brought out by Alfred Guillaume.

<sup>66</sup> Yahyā b. Sa'īd al-Umawī (d.194/810) was a very reliable transmitter of *ḥadīth*.

Abū l-'Abbās al-Walīd b. Muslim (d. 195/811) from Damascus wrote on *ḥadīth*, history and *maghāzī*.

Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad b. 'Umar b. Wāqid (d. 270/822) was the most knowledgeable writer on *maghāzī*, *Siyar* and conquests; he is not, however, very reliable, and the authenticity of his reports has frequently been questioned.

<sup>67</sup> Abū Ishāq b. Muḥammad b. al-Hārith al-Fizārī (d. 188/804), a student of al-Awzā'ī (d. 157/774) and a scholar of *ḥadīth*, wrote a book on history: '*Kitāb al-Sayr fī l-Akhbār wal l-Aḥdāth*'.

<sup>68</sup> Abū 'Umar 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Amr al-Awzā'ī (88/707-157/774) the leader (imam) of the Syrians in *ḥadīth* as well as *fiqh*, lived and died at Beirut. He compiled a book on *ḥadīth*, and his *fiqh* dominated Spain upto the time of al-Ḥakam ibn Hishām (d.207/822).

ibn Jubayr<sup>69</sup> and others. Similarly knowledgeable are the students of 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd from Kufah, some of whom are most distinguished scholars.<sup>70</sup> Among the Madinian scholars of *tafsīr*, mention may be made of Zayd ibn Aslam from whom Imaām Mālik learned *tafsīr* as did Zayd's son 'Abd al-Raḥmān and 'Abd Allāh ibn Wahab.<sup>71</sup>

*Mursal* traditions which have been transmitted through numerous channels, and have not been produced by collusion between the transmitters, and whose agreement with each other is merely incidental, are definitely true. For a tradition is either authentic and true to the event, or it is a lie wilfully concocted by the narrator, or erroneous wherein he has inadvertently committed some error. Hence the report which is free from deliberate lie and accidental error is certainly true.

<sup>69</sup> For Mujāhid see note 17. Atā b. Ribāḥ (27/280-114/732) a student of 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās in *tafsīr*, was the most distinguished *faqīh* of his time at Makkah.

Abū 'Abdullāh 'Ikramah, a barber slave of Ibn 'Abbās, freed after the death of the master by the latter's son, 'Alī, distinguished himself as a scholar of the Qur'ān. Al-Sha'bī has said: "There is no one on the earth more knowledgeable about the Book of God than 'Ikramah". (al-Dhahbī, *al-Tafsīr wal-Mafassirūn*, Vol. I, p.111).

Abū Sha'thā' Jābir b. Yazīd al-Azudī (d. 93/712) Abu Muhammad Said Jubayr (d95/714) originally from Habshah were the other three distinguished students of Ibn 'Abbās in *tafsīr*. The last one was regarded by some as the most knowledgeable on the Qur'ān than any of his fellow students including Mujāhid, and Tāwūs (al-Dhahbī, *al-Tafsīr wa l-Mufasssirūn*, Vol. I, p. 103).

<sup>70</sup> Among the most famous students of 'Abdullāh Ibn Mas'ūd at Kufah were 'Alqamah b. Qays (d.61/680), and Masrūq b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān (d.64/604).

<sup>71</sup> Zayd ibn Aslam (d. 136/753), a client (*mawlā*) of 'Umar was a very distinguished scholar of the Qur'ān among the students of Ubay ibn Ka'b al-Anṣārī's school of *tafsīr* at Madinah. Other distinguished students of this school were Abū l-'Āliyah (d.90/709), and Ka'b al-Qarẓī (d. 118/7836). For Imām Mālik see note 12.

Hence if a *ḥadīth* is reported through two or more channels, and if the transmitters are not found to have conspired, and if it is true that agreements on such things do not happen without collaboration, simply by chance, we can be sure of its authenticity. Suppose a person reports an event and gives details of what was said or done; then another person whom we know that he did not discuss with the first, reports the event and mentions all the words and actions which the first had reported, we will conclude that the event is true and has been, on the whole, correctly reported. For if both give a wrong report, whether deliberately or by mistake, it is very unusual that one would come out with the same details as the other. This would not be possible unless one conspires with the other. To be sure, it is very much possible that a person composes one verse and another composes the same verse without the knowledge of the first, or that one tells a lie and another person tells a similar lie. But it is certainly not possible that a poet composes a whole long poem with all its embellishments and charms in a particular metre and rhyme, and another poet composes the same poem without any difference in language, content or size. If such a thing does happen, we will only conclude that one has taken it from the other. Similarly, if one produces a long report and mentions a lot of things, and another gives the same report, he has either colluded with the other or taken it from him, or else the report is true.

In this way we become sure of the authenticity of most of the traditions that have been transmitted through many channels. However, it is true that a tradition which has been transmitted by only one channel is not enough; for it might be *mursal*, or there



might be some inaccuracy in the transmission. Even multichannelled traditions do not guarantee the accuracy of words or details; these things cannot be ascertained in this way. We have another method to establish the accuracy of words and details. For example: We know that the battle of Badr occurred and occurred before the battle of Uhud. This is established by *tawātur* (that is, by a stream of traditions with unbroken continuity). We also know as certain that Ḥamzah, 'Alī and 'Ubaydah<sup>72</sup> came out to meet 'Utbah, Shaybah and al-Walīd during the combat, and that 'Alī killed al-Walīd and Ḥamzah killed his combatant; but we are not sure as to whom Ḥamzah fought, 'Utbah or Shaybah. One must keep this principle in mind; for it is the criterion by which one can ascertain the truth of many of the traditions in the field of *ḥadīth*, *tafsīr* and *maghāzī* as well as the reports about the life and the words of other people.

Hence, if a *ḥadīth* to which this principle may apply is reported from the Prophet by two men, and we come to know that neither took it from the other, we will be sure of its authenticity, particularly when it is known that the reporters do not lie, even though they might forget something or commit some error in their reporting. Those who know the Companions like Ibn Mas'ūd, Ubay ibn Ka'b, Ibn 'Umar, Jābir, Abū Sa'īd, Abū Hurayrah<sup>73</sup> and others, definitely know that none

<sup>72</sup> Ḥamzah b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, an uncle of the Prophet, a great soldier and 'the leader of the martyres' was killed in the battle of Uhud in 3 A.H. 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the cousin of the Prophet, one of the three earliest Muslims, married Fātimah, the daughter of the Prophet, the fourth caliph and a great scholar of the Qur'ān, *ḥadīth*, and *fiqh* died at Kūfah in 40/660.

'Ubaydah b. al-Ḥārith b. al-Muṭṭalib was the cousin brother of the Prophet from his uncle al-Ḥārith.

<sup>73</sup> For Ibn Mas'ūd and Ibn 'Umar see notes 9 and 11. (contd on next page)

of them would tell a lie about the Prophet; and certainly not those Companions who are greater than them. It is just like knowing the veracity of someone whom you have experienced and tested for a long time that he does not steal money; commit robbery or give false witness, etc.

Similarly, one who knows that successors of Madīnah, Makkah, Syria and Basrah such as Abū Ṣammān, al-A'raj, Sulayman ibn Yasār, Zayd ibn Aslam<sup>74</sup> and others like them knows with certainty that they would not lie in *ḥadīth*, not to mention those who are better than them like Muḥammad ibn Sīrīn, al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad, Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyib, 'Ubaydat al-Salmāni, 'Alqamah and al-Aswad<sup>75</sup> etc.

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Ubay ibn Ka'b al-Anṣārī, one of the scribes of the Qur'ān who wrote parts of it at the Prophet's bidding, taught the Qur'ān at Madīnah. He died during the rule of 'Umar b. al-Khattāb. For the students of his school of *tafsīr* see note 71.

Jābir b. 'Abdullah al-Anṣārī (16/607-78/687) one of the prolific transmitters of *ḥadīth*, taught *ḥadīth* at the Mosque of the Prophet at Madīnah.

Abū S'aid Sa'd ibn Mālik b. Sinān al-Khudrī was one of those men who were in the service of the Prophet at different times. He has narrated quite a lot of *ḥadīth*. He died at Madīnah.

Abū Hurayrah (d. 58/678), the greatest narrator of *ḥadīth*, has narrated, according to a very cautious recent study, some 1236 *ahādīth*. ('Azamī: *Studies in Ḥadīth Methodology and Literature*, Indianapolis, American Trust Publication, 1977, p.26.)

<sup>74</sup> Abū Sāleḥ Zakwān b. 'Abdullah al-Sammān (d. ca. 203/818), Abū Ḥazm 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Hurmuz al-A'raj (d. 117/735), and Sulaymān b. Yasār (d. 107/725) all from Madīnah are well known narrators of *ḥadīth*.

For Zayd ibn Aslam see note 71.

<sup>75</sup> Muḥammad ibn Sīrīn (d. 110/728), a very distinguished Successor and scholar of *ḥadīth* was known for his piety and devotions. Al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad, the grandson of Abū Bakr al-Siddīq and a scholar of *ḥadīth* and *fiqh* died in 106/724.

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To be sure, they may err; for people often forget and commit errors. However, there are *ḥuffāz* (memorisers and narrators) of *ḥadīth* such as al-Sha'ī, al-Zuhrī, 'Urwah, Qatādah and al-Thawrī<sup>76</sup> who have been known to be above error. Al-Zuhrī and al-Thawrī, in particular, were famous for that in their times. It has been a common saying that Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī never commits error though he has memorised a lot of *ahādīth*.

The point I am making is that if a long *ḥadīth* is reported through two different channels without any prior discussion between the reporters, it cannot be wrong on the whole, even though it might not be completely free from error. Hence, if someone relates a long and elaborate story, and another relates exactly as the first without a prior discussion between them, the story as a whole cannot be wrong. Nor can its reporters be imagined to have lied if they had not previously entered into a conspiracy.

Error has occurred in parts of some reports like the one about the Prophet's purchase of a camel from Jābir. One who reflects upon the various ways in which the purchase has been reported will be convinced that the *ḥadīth* is true, even though there is

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Abū Muḥammad Sa'ed ibn al-Musayyib (d.94/712), a great scholar of *ḥadīth*, *fiqh* and the Qur'ān is hailed as the Leader of the Successors (*Sayyid al-Tābi'in*).

'Ubaydah b. 'Amr al-Salmānī, a well known narrator of *ḥadīth*, a *faqīh* and a judge from Yaman died in the year 72/691.

For 'Alqamah see note 70.

<sup>76</sup> For al-Sha'ī, al-Zuhrī and 'Urwah see note 65, and for Sufyān al-Thawrī see note 19.

Abu l-Khaṭṭāb Qatādah b. Du'amah (d.118/736), a man of extraordinary memory was the most distinguished narrator of *ḥadīth* at Basra.

disagreement among the reporters about the price of the camel as al-Bukhārī has explained in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*.<sup>77</sup> In fact, the great majority of the *aḥādīth* which al-Bukhārī and Muslim have recorded in their books have been said by the Prophet. Most *aḥādīth* of these collections have been found to be of this kind, and scholars have approved of them and accepted them, and the Ummah does not agree on something which is not true. If the *ḥadīth* of the camel were in reality false and the Ummah approved of it, it would mean that they agreed on approving a thing which was in fact false. It would amount to a consensus (*ijmā'*) on untruth, which is ruled out. We, however, admit that a report on which there is no consensus may be incorrect or false. We likewise admit that a thing on which there is yet no consensus, and which is based on the words of a text, or is supported only by a non-demonstrative argument may be true in essence, even if it goes against what we think. However, if there is a consensus on it, we would be sure that it is true in meaning as well as in word.

This is the basis of the principle on which the scholars of all the schools of thought agree that if the Ummah accepts a one-man tradition (*ḵabar al-wāḥid*), and approves of it and acts upon it, it gives knowledge. This has been stated by writers on the principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) of all the schools of fiqh: the Ḥanafī, the Mālikī, the Shāfi'ī and the Ḥanbalī. Only a few writers of later times, under the influence of a small group of theologians, have denied it. However, many theologians, in fact most of them, agree with the jurists, the scholars of *ḥadīth* and

<sup>77</sup> Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, kit. Al-shurūt (Cairo, 1353/1934), XIII:28-30. See also Fath al-Bari, 5:340-6, and Sirat Ibn Hisham, 3:219.

the Elders (*salaf*) on this point. This is the view, for instance, of most of the Ash'arites like Abū Ishāq and Ibn Fūrak.<sup>78</sup> The first man who first differed from this view was Ibn al-Bāqillānī. He was later followed by Abū l-Ma'ālī, Abū Hāmid, Ibn 'Aqīl, Ibn al-Jawzī, Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, al-Āmidī<sup>79</sup> and others. The first view is held by al-Shaykh Abū Hāmid, Abu l-Ṭayyib and Abū Ishāq<sup>80</sup> among the leaders of the Shāfi'ī school; Qādī

<sup>78</sup> The Ash'arites are the followers of Abu 'l-Hasan al-Ash'arī (260/873-324/935). A pupil of the famous Mu'tazilite theologian, al-Jubbā'ī, al-Ash'arī realised at the age of forty that the Mu'tazilite theology was in conflict with Islamic faith, gave it up and developed a new theology which goes by his name, and which, because of the works of some great thinkers and writers in the following centuries became the dominant theology of the Islamic world. Al-Ash'arī expounded his ideas in many books, the most important of which are al-Ibānah and al-Luma'.

Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Muhammad al-Isfarā'īnī (d.417/1026) was born at Isfarā'īn, between Nishāpur and Jurjān. He taught and wrote at Nishapur, and his works include a book in *Uṣūl al Fiqh*, and another on theology, *al-Jāmī' fi 'Uṣūl al-Dīn* in five volumes.

Muḥammad b. al-Hasan b. Fūrak al-Isfahānī (d. 406/1015), an Ash'arite in theology, and a Shāfi'ite in *fiqh* wrote a number of books in theology, *fiqh* and Qur'ānic sciences.

<sup>79</sup> Ibn Taymīyah has, perhaps, in mind Qādī Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn al-Ṭayyib al-Bāqillānī (d.403/1013). One of the most outstanding theologians, al-Bāqillānī was born at Basrah, settled at Baghdad where he died. Besides many books on theology which include his famous work *al-Tamhīd* and *al-Inṣāf*, he also wrote on the *I'jāz al-Qur'ān*.

Abū l-Ma'ālī 'Abd al-Malik b. 'Abdullāh al-Juwaynī, commonly known as Imām al-Ḥarmayn (d.478/1085) was the teacher of Imām Ghazālī. His works on theology include *Kitāb al-Irshād* and *al-Shāmīl*.

<sup>80</sup> Abū Hāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī is known as *Hujjat al-Islām* for his profound criticism of Greek philosophy and the defence of Islamic faith. His writings include many books on Shāfi'ī *fiqh*, a great work on principles of jurisprudence, *al-Mustasfā*, and exposition of Islam as faith and life under the title, *Iḥyā 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, which is his magnum opus, *al-Iqtisād fi l-I'tiqād* in Ash'arite

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'Abd al-Wahhāb<sup>81</sup> and others of the Mālikī school; Shams al-Dīn al-Sarkhāsī<sup>82</sup> and others from the Hanafī school; and Abū-Khaṭṭāb, Abu l-Ḥasan al-Zāghūnī<sup>83</sup> and others from the Hanbalī school.

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theology, and many others on Sufism and philosophy. Ghazālī's writings, however, bear the mark of some philosophical, sufistic and theological beliefs which he could not succeed to overcome.

'Alī ibn 'Aqīl (d.513/1119), a great Hanbalī scholar, was born at Baghdad, and has contributed many volumes on Hanbalī *fiqh*, and a book on *uṣūl al-fiqh* in three volumes (al-Zarkalī, *al-A'lām*, vol. V: 129).

Abu l-Faraj 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200) a great Hanbalī scholar and a prolific writer, wrote on history, *ḥadīth*, Qur'ān and biography. His works which exceed three hundred volumes include books such as *al-Nāsikh wa l-Mansūkh*, *al-Mutashābih min al-Āyāt al-Qur'ānīyah*, and a commentary on the Qur'ān, *Zād al-Masīr fī 'Ilm al-Tafsīr* (al-Zarkalī, *al-A'lām*, vol.IV : 89).

Aḥmad b. 'Alī b. Thābit, commonly known as al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071), is famous for his *History of Baghdād* in fourteen volumes. He has besides, works on the transmission of *ḥadīth* and the contribution of *ḥadīth* scholars.

Abu l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Muḥammad Saif al-Dīn al-Āmidī famous for his work, *al-Iḥkām fī Uṣūl al-Aḥkām* in jurisprudence and *Abkār al-Afkār fī 'ilm al-kalām* in theology, was born and brought up at Baghdād, taught in Egypt and died at Damascus in 631/1233.

Shaykh Abū Ḥāmid Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Isfarā'īnī, a great scholar of Shāfi'ī *fiqh* in Iraq, has written comments and glosses on the works of *fiqh*. He died in 406/1015.

Muḥammad b. Al-Fadl b. Salmah b. Āṣim (d. 308/920) commonly known as Abū al-Ṭayyib, another Shāfi'ī *faqīh*, was from Baghdad. For Abū Ishāq see note 78.

<sup>81</sup> 'Abd al-Wahhāb b. 'Alī b. Naṣr Tawq (d.422/1031), a Mālikī *faqīh*, poet and a man of letters of Baghdād has commented on *al-Mudawwanah*, the great work on Mālikī *fiqh* and written other books.

<sup>82</sup> Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Abū Bakr al-Sarkhāsī, (d. 490/1097) a great scholar of Hanafī *fiqh*, known as *Shams al-A'imnāh*, ranks among the *mujāhidīn fī al-masā'il*. His most eminent work is *al-Mabsūṭ* in 30 volumes.

<sup>83</sup> Muḥammad b. Al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad Abū Ya'lā (d. 458/1066) a  
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Consensus on the genuineness of a *ḥadīth* which makes it certain (*qaṭ'ī*) is a consensus of the scholars of *ḥadīth*, as the consensus on rules (*ahkām*) which is counted is the consensus of the scholars who are concerned with the injunctions of the Shar' such as commands, prohibitions, and permissions.

The point we are making is that multiple channels of transmission, without prior discussion or agreement between the reporters usually guarantee the validity of the content of the tradition transmitted. However, those who are acquainted with the lives of the transmitters can make better use of the tradition. They can also use the traditions which are reported by transmitters who are not well known or who are quite weak in their memory, as well as the traditions which are *mursal*. Many scholars have noted down *aḥādīth* of this type. They think that even though by themselves these traditions do not prove anything, they can nonetheless be used to strengthen other *aḥādīth*. Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal has said that sometimes he notes down the *ḥadīth* of a person just to strengthen another *ḥadīth*. As an example, he has mentioned the name of 'Abdullāh ibn Lahī'ah<sup>84</sup>, the Qadi of Egypt. This man narrated a

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very distinguished Ḥanbalī *faqīh*, and writer, served as judge at Baghdad and other places. He has books on Ḥanbalī *fiqh*, *uṣūl* and theology. His *al-Ahkām al-Sulṭāniyah* on the principles of government is well known. He has also a work on the *Ahkām al-Qur'ān*.

Abū l-Khaṭṭāb Maḥfūd b. Al-Ḥasan (d. 510/1116) born and brought up in Baghdad, was considered the leader of the Hanbalīs in his time. He has written on Ḥanbalī *fiqh*, *uṣūl* and theology.

Abu l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. 'Abd Allāh al-Zāghūnī (d. 527/1132) and an eminent Hanbalī scholar, *faqīh* and historian, has books on *fiqh*, *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *uṣūl al-Dīn*, besides *fatāwā*. (al-Zarkalī, *al-A'lām*, V: 124).

<sup>84</sup> 'Abd Allāh b. Lahiy'ah, the Qadi of Egypt was born in 96/714 and died in 174/790. His books were burned in 170/786.

lot of *aḥādīth* and was one of the best men of *ḥadīth*. But since his books were burned in a fire, he began to make errors in his narration. Consequently, Aḥmad used his *ḥadīth* only as a supporting evidence. His name has often been mentioned along with the name of al-Layth ibn Sa'd.<sup>85</sup> But al-Layth is one of the known leading authorities on *ḥadīth*.

The scholars of *ḥadīth* often used a *ḥadīth* which suffers from error caused by weakness of memory as a supporting evidence. They have even considered some *aḥādīth* reported by reliable (*thiqah*), true (*sādiq*) and correct narrators (*al-zābit*) to be weak in which they are able to find out some defects. The science that discusses these reasons is called *'ilm 'ilal al-ḥadīth*, the science of the hidden defects of *ḥadīth*, which is one of their noblest disciplines. A *ḥadīth* which is reported by a reliable and correct narrator sometimes has errors which can be easily detected. It is, for instance, known that the Prophet married Maymūnah when he was putting on *iḥrām*, and prayed two rak'ahs in the Haram. Hence the *ḥadīth* of Ibn 'Abbās would be regarded as incorrect which says that the Prophet married Maymūnah when he had put off the *iḥrām*, and did not pray two rak'ahs.<sup>86</sup> It is likewise known

<sup>85</sup> Abū l-Hārith al-Layth b. Sa'd (94/713 – 175/791), the most famous scholar of Egypt of his times, was also a *faqīh* of eminence. Al-Shāfi'ī has said that he was a better *faqīh* than Malik; it is unfortunate that he did not have students like other masters to develop his *fiqh* (al-Zarkalī, *al-A'lām*, VI; 115).

<sup>86</sup> For the *aḥādīth* on the subject see al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, hajj, 23, 24; Abū Dawūd, *Sunan*, manāsik, 21, 38; Aḥmad, *Musnad*, Vol. 6 : 393; al-Dārīmī, *sunan*, 21; al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan*, manāsik, 90; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, sayd, 12, nikāh, 30, maghāzī, 43; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, nikāh, 46, 47, 48. For discussion on the subject see Fath al-Bari 9:135, 1:458 and al-Zarqanī, *Sharh al-Muwatta*, 2:272, 352.



that the Prophet did 'Umrah four times,<sup>87</sup> (but never in Rajab). Hence the *ḥadīth* of Ibn 'Umar which says that the Prophet performed 'Umrah in Rajab<sup>88</sup> is mistaken. It is known that the Prophet did *tamattu*<sup>89</sup> at the time of his farewell ḥajj, and did it safely in peace. Hence, the saying of 'Uthmān to 'Alī that they were not feeling safe at that time<sup>90</sup> is not correct. Al-Bukhārī has recorded the *ḥadīth* that Hell will not be filled till God would create a different kind of creature for it.<sup>91</sup> This is another instance where error has crept in; and there are many more *aḥadīth* like this.

Opinions are extremely divided on this issue. A section of theologians and others like them who have little knowledge of *ḥadīth* and its transmitters do not differentiate between an authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) *ḥadīth* and a weak one. Consequently, they doubt the authenticity of *ḥadīth* or deny that it provides definite knowledge, in spite of the fact that the scholars of *ḥadīth* believe

<sup>87</sup> Aḥmad, *Musnad*, Vol. III : 245, 256, 134; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 'umrah: 3; Ibn Mājah *sunan*, manāsik : 50

<sup>88</sup> Aḥmad, *Musnad*, Vol. II : 129, 155; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 'umrah : 3; al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, manāsik, 37. See also Fath al- Bari, 3: 473 at-Shawkanī, *Nayl-al-Awtar*, 4:314.

<sup>89</sup> You perform 'umrah and put off the *iḥrām* and take up normal life, and when the time come you put on *iḥrām* again and perform *ḥajj*, this is called *ḥajj al-tamattu*'.

<sup>90</sup> Aḥmad, *Musnad* Vol. I : 61. See also Fath al-Bari, 3: 331, also al-Shawokani *Nayl-al-Awtar* 4:325.

<sup>91</sup> The relevant part of the *ḥadīth* which Imām Aḥmad has recorded as reported by Abū Hurayrah runs like this:

"... the Hell will not be filled till God will place his foot (in it). There-upon it will say: "enough, enough". It will then be full, and one part of it will meat the other part. God will not be unjust to any of His creatures. So far as Paradise is concerned, God will raise for it another creature. (*Musnad*, Vol. II : 314).

The *ḥadīth* has also been reported by Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī in similar words (Aḥmad, *Musnad*, Vol. III : 31). As for the meaning of "foot" see Fath al-Bari, 8:482, 13:372, 11:350.

them true and authentic. On the other hand, a group which claims to believe in *ḥadīth* and act upon it, whenever they receive a *ḥadīth* which is reported by a reliable (*thiqah*) transmitter, or find a *ḥadīth* whose *isnād* is apparently sound, count it among those *aḥādīth* whose authenticity has been established by scholars; but when it appears to conflict with a *ḥadīth* known to be authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*), they resort to weak and facile interpretations, and insist upon abiding by it in spite of the fact that the scholars of *ḥadīth* have condemned this kind of attitude.

As there are ways to determine the truth of a *ḥadīth* and establish its authenticity, there are similar grounds to ascertain whether a *ḥadīth* is false or fabricated. For instance, we can be sure that the *aḥādīth* which have been narrated by misguided innovators (*ah al-bid'ah*) and the exaggerators of the merits of works (*ahl al-ghulū fi l-fadā'il*) are false. An example is the *ḥadīth* about the tenth day of Muḥarram (*al-Āshūrā'*) that one who offers two *rak'ahs* of prayer on that day will receive the reward of many prophets.<sup>92</sup>

In *tafsīr*, too, there is a big lot of fabricated *aḥādīth* which have been produced by al-Tha'labī,<sup>93</sup> al-Wāhidī,<sup>94</sup> and al-Zamakhsharī<sup>95</sup> during their discussion

<sup>92</sup> See al-Suyūfī, *al-Lā'ālī al-Maṣnū'ah fi l-Aḥādīth al-Mawdū'ah*, Cairo, Vol. II, p. 54.

<sup>93</sup> The commentary of Abū Ishāq Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Tha'labī (d. 427/1036) is entitled: *al-Kashf wa l-Bayān 'an Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. It has not been published yet.

<sup>94</sup> 'Alī b. Aḥmad al-Wāhidī al-Nishāpūrī (d. 468/1075), a student of al-Tha'labī wrote three commentaries on the Qur'ān, one small, another large and the third of medium size which alone has been published.

<sup>95</sup> Abū l-Qāsim Muḥammad b. 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī (467/1075-538) entitled *Jār Allah*, a great man of letters, a poet and grammarian and a staunch mu'tazilī is famous more than any thing else for his

of the merits of each *sūrah* of the Qur'ān. Scholars are agreed that these traditions are fabricated (*mawdū'*). As a man, al-Tha'labī was righteous and pious. But he cared little about his sources and copied from the books of *tafsīr* all kinds of things without discriminating between the authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*), the weak and the fabricated. His student al-Wāḥidī was a better scholar of Arabic *aḥādīth*, but his writings are less safe and far removed from the principles of the Elders. Al-Baghawī's<sup>96</sup> Commentary is a summary of al-Tha'labī's Commentary, but he has purged it of all fabricated *aḥādīth* and wrong ideas. In fact, fabricated *aḥādīth* are in considerable number in the books of *tafsīr*. To cite just a few examples: all the *aḥādīth* which say that one should say 'Bismillāh' loudly<sup>97</sup>; the long *ḥadīth* which says that 'Alī gave his ring in charity while he was praying'<sup>98</sup>; the *ḥadīth* that the verse, "Every nation has had a guide"<sup>99</sup> refers to 'Alī'<sup>100</sup>; and the verse, "It will be heard by attentive ears"<sup>101</sup> refers to the ears of 'Alī'.<sup>102</sup> All these *aḥādīth* are completely fabricated.

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commentary on the Qur'ān: *al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq wa Ghawāmīd al-Tanzīl*, which has been published many times. Most copies are now printed with the comments of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Al-Munīr al-Iskandarānī (d. 683/1284) refuting his theological doctrines and deductions entitled : *al-Inṣāf min al-Kashshāf*.

<sup>96</sup> The commentary of al-Baghawī, al-Ḥusayn b. Mas'ud b. Muḥammad al-Farra (d. 510/1116) bears the title: *Ma'ālim al-Tanzīl*. It was summarised by Tāj al-Dīn 'Abd al-Wahhab b. Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī (d.874/1470).

<sup>97</sup> For a discussion on the subject see Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, Vol. 1, pp. 16-7, and Ibn Taymīyah, *Majmū' Fatāwā*, Riyadh, Vol. 22, pp.441-43.

<sup>98</sup> See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-'Azīm* (Beirut, Dar al-Ma'rifah, 1326 A.H.) Vol. II, p.71.

<sup>99</sup> *al-Qur'ān*, 13 : 7.

<sup>100</sup> See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 501-2.

<sup>101</sup> *al-Qur'ān*, 69 : 12.

<sup>102</sup> See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, *op. cit.* Vol. IV, p. 413.

## Chapter Four

# DIFFERENCES IN TAFSĪR AS A RESULT OF SECTERIAN BIAS

The second cause for the difference in *tafsīr* concerns reasoning rather than tradition. The errors that have crept into *tafsīr* through this channel have mostly been the result of two things which appeared after the activity of *tafsīr* by the Companions, the Successors and their Followers had come to an end. They are not to be found in the commentaries that are based on the comments of these three generations such as the commentaries of 'Abd al-Razzāq, Wakī', 'Abd ibn Ḥumayd, 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Ibrāhīm Duḥaym, Imām Aḥmad, Ishāq ibn Rāḥwayh, Baqī ibn Makhḥad, Abū Bakr ibn Mundhir, Sufyān ibn 'Uyanah, Sunayd, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Abū Sa'īd al-Ashajj, Abū 'Abd Allāh ibn Mājah and Ibn Mardawayh.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>103</sup> Abū 'Abd al-Razzāq b. Hammām al-Ṣam'ānī (d. 211/826), a *muḥaddith* and *faqīh* has books on *Fiqh*, *maghāzī*, *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr*. (Kahhālāh, *Mu'jam al-Muwallifin*, Vol. V : 219).

Abū Sufyān Wakī' b. Al-Jarrāḥ (d. 197/812), a well known scholar of *ḥadīth* in Irāq has books on *ḥadīth*, *tafsīr* and history. (Kahhālāh, *Mu'jam*, 13 : 166).

'Abd b. Ḥumayd (d. 249/863) had a large collection (*Musnad*) of *ḥadīth* and a *tafsīr* of the Qur'ān. (Kahhālāh, *Mu'jam*, 5: 66).

'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ibrāhīm Duḥaym al-Damishqī (d. 245/859) was a renowned scholar of *ḥadīth* of his times in Syria. He also served as judge of the city of Tabrīyah and died in Palestine.

For Imām Aḥmad see note 22.

...(contd on next page)

The first thing which happened was that people first formed some ideas and then interpreted the

... (contd from previous page)

Abū muḥammad Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm Rāhwayh (d. 238/852) was the most outstanding scholar of *ḥadīth* and *fiqh* in Khurāsān in his times.

Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān Baqī b. Makhlad (d.276/889) a Spanish *muḥaddith*, *faqīh* and *tafsīr* writer was born at Qurtubah, travelled to many places, Makkah, Madinah, Egypt, Syria and Irahq for *ḥadīth*. Among his works there is a *tafsīr* of the Qur'ān and a collection of the *fatāwā* of the Companions and the Successors. (Kahhālāh, *Mu'jam*, 3:54).

Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Al-Mundhir (d. 198/813) was born at Nishāpūr, and distinguished himself as a scholar of *ḥadīth*.

Abū 'Alī al-Husayn b. Dawūd called Sunayd, a *ḥāfiẓ* of *ḥadīth* and an official in charge of public morals died in 226/841.

Sufyān ibn 'Uyaynah b. Maymūn (107/725-198/814) was born at Kūfah but settled at Makkah where he died. A well-known transmitter of *ḥadīth*, he left a collection of *ḥadīth* (*al-Jāmi'*) and a book on *tafsīr*. (al-Zarkalī, *al-A'lām*, III : 159)

Abū ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (224/839 – 310/923) a great historian, an eminent *faqīh* of the rank of *mujtahid*, and a very outstanding commentator of the Qur'ān was born in Tabristān and settled in Baghdad where he died. His commentary, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* is the most eminent *tafsīr* based on the traditions of the *salaf* available to us. Among his other works is his *Tārīkh al-Umam wa l-Mulūk*, *Tahdhīb al-Āthār*, *Ikhtilāf al-Fuqahā*, and *Ādāb al-Quḍāt*.

'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. Abī Hātim al-Rāzī (d. 327/839), a scholar and a critic of *ḥadīth* has written many books which include a commentary on the Qur'ān, a big collection of *ḥadīth*, and two works on *Ilal al-Ḥadīth* and *al-Jirḥ wa l-Ta'dīl*. (Kahhālāh, *Mu'jam* V : 170)

'Abū Sa'id Abd Allāh b. Sa'id b. Hasīn (d.257/871) commonly known as al-Ashajj was a distinguished scholar of *ḥadīth* at Kūfah. He also wrote a commentary on the Qur'ān. (Kahhālāh, *Mu'jam*, VI:58)

Muḥammad b. Yazīd b. Mājāh al-Qazwīnī (209/824 – 273/886) is the compiler of the sixth most authentic collection of *aḥādīth*. Besides his *Sunan*, he wrote also a book on *tafsīr*, and another on the biographies of the transmitters of *ḥadīth*.

Aḥmad b. Mūsa b. Mardwayh al-Isfahānī (d. 410/1019) a historian and a *ḥāfiẓ* of *ḥadīth* wrote besides a *Musnad* of *ḥadīth*, a *tafsīr* of the Qur'ān. (al-Zarkalī, *al-A'lām*, I : 261).

Qur'ān in the light of those ideas. The second thing which happened was that they began to explain Qur'ānic passage just as any Arabic speaking person would understand them without considering who their Author was, to whom were they revealed, and to whom they addressed. Those who did the first thing thought only of the ideas they believed without considering what the words of the Qur'ān really meant or implied. The people who did the second thing considered only the words and what an Arab would mean by them without thinking whether or not what they understood from them behoved their Author, or fitted the context. They were often mistaken in thinking that the language allowed them to take the words in the sense they understood, as did the people of the former group. And as the former group was mistaken in giving wrong meaning to the verses of the Qur'ān, so was the latter. The difference between them is a difference of approach: one considers the ideas, while the other considers the words.

The former group often does two things: they sometimes deny the meaning of a word which the Qur'ān implies and intends to convey, and sometimes attribute to it a meaning which the Qur'ān does not imply nor intends to convey. They are either mistaken in both – in what they deny and what they attribute – and are, consequently, wrong in their argument as well as in the idea they argue. Or they are wrong only in the argument which they advance, but not in the idea which they argue. This happens in the *tafsīr* of the Qur'ān as well as the *tafsīr* of the *ḥadīth*.

Those who are wrong in both respects, such as the people who indulge in unjustified innovations of various kinds, have held beliefs opposite to the true

beliefs of the righteous people, the Elders (*salaf*) of the Ummah and its leaders (*a'imma*) who never agree on error. They explain the Qur'ān in the light of their beliefs, sometimes arguing from verses which do not support them, and sometimes explaining away those which contradict them. They take out words from their contexts and change their meaning. Various sects of Khawārij<sup>104</sup>, Jahmīyah<sup>105</sup>, Mu'tazilah<sup>106</sup>, Qadarīyah<sup>107</sup>,

<sup>104</sup> Originally Khawārij are the people who left the camp of 'Alī after he agreed to arbitration (*taḥkīm*) between him and his opponent Mu'āwīyah following the battle of Siffin (36/656). They condemned *taḥkīm* as an act of infidelity (*kufīr*) and called both the parties who agreed to it as infidels. They went further and dubbed everyone who committed a big sin (*kaḥīrah*) infidel (*kāfir*), and thought it incumbent on every Muslim to fight against him. Afterwards they developed other theological and political views which set them always at war with the majority of the Ummah. Most of their sub-sects have now vanished; however some remnants are still found in south-eastern part of the Arabian peninsula. They have commented on the Qur'ān in the light of their views; but none of these commentaries are extant now.

<sup>105</sup> Jahmīyah are the followers of Jahm ibn Safwān who was executed by Ibn Ajwan al-Muzanī in 123/746. They believe that man has no freedom and is absolutely determined, that faith means the knowledge of God and involves no action, that God is not qualified with attributes shared by men such as knowing, living, hearing, speaking, etc., although He can be said to be the Creator and Powerful, and that the Qur'ān is created. (al-Baghḍādī, *al-Farq bayn al-Firaq* Beirut, 1980, pp. 199-200).

<sup>106</sup> Mu'tazilah is the name which was given to Wāsil ibn 'Atā and his friends and followers when he left his teacher Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) on the question regarding the position of one who commits a big sin (*kaḥīrah*). Wāsil (d. 131/748) said that he is neither a Muslim nor a kāfir; he has a position between faith and infidelity. Ibn Taymīyah has described the views of the Mutazilite in the book.

<sup>107</sup> Qadarīyah refers to the sects originating from the pre-Mu'tazilite times who denied predestination of things by God and His creation of human actions, and asserted that man is completely free in his will and choice and is the creator of his actions.

Murji'ah<sup>108</sup> and others fall into this category. Of these, the Mu'tazilah, who are the most articulate and polemical, have written commentaries on the Qur'ān in the light of their beliefs. We have, for instance, the commentary of 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Kaysān al-Aṣamm, the teacher of Ibrāhīm ibn Ismā'īl ibn 'Ulayyah, who used to dispute with al-Shāf'ī; the book of Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī; *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* of Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār ibn Aḥmad al-Hamadānī; *al-Jāmi' li 'Ilm al-Qur'ān* of 'Alī ibn 'Īsā al-Rummānī, and *al-Kashshāf* of Abū l-Qāsim al-Zamakhsharī.<sup>109</sup>

They and many others like them believe in the five fundamental principles of *I'tizāl* which they call *al-tawḥīd* or faith in the unity of God; *al-'adl*, Divine justice; *al-manzilah bayn al-manzilatayn*, the station

<sup>108</sup> Murji'ah are the extreme opponents of the Khawārij. They believe that faith is mere knowledge, that one does not lose it through sin no matter how grave. Whether or not he will be punished in the Hereafter is left to the will and mercy of God; hopefully he will be forgiven. The extremists among them believe that given faith, sin will cause no harm in the hereafter.

<sup>109</sup> 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Kaysān al-Aṣamm has been said to have written a commentary on the Qur'ān but it is not extant.

Abū 'Alī Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Jubbā'ī (d. 303/915), one of the eminent leaders of the Mu'tazilah, is also credited with a commentary on the Qur'ān (Ibn Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*).

Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad al-Hamadānī (d. 415/1024) a very eminent Mu'tazilī writer, theologian and judge has written a number of books. On the Qur'ān he wrote a commentary: *Tanzīh al-Qur'ān min al-Maṭā'in* which is in fact a commentary on selected surahs and verses. His *Mutashābih al-Qur'ān* has been edited and published by Dr. 'Adnān Zarzūr, 1869. His *magnum opus* in theology is *al-Mughnī*, many parts of which have been edited and published. His *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah* is an exposition of the fundamental principles of the Mu'tazilah in one volume.

Abū l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. 'Īsā al-Rummānī (d. 384/994), a Mu'tazilite Shī'ah writer of Baghdad has besides many books on theology a *Tafsīr* on the Qur'ān.

For al-Zamakhsharī see note 95.



between two stations; *infādh al-wa'īd*, enforcement of the threatened punishment; and *amr bi l-ma'rūf wa l-nahy 'an al-munkar*, the duty of enjoining the good and forbidding the evil. Their *tawhīd* is the *tawhīd* of the Jamīyah which amounts to the negation of Divine attributes. They infer from it that God will not be seen, that He does not have attributes such as knowledge, power, life, hearing, seeing, speech, will etc.

Their doctrine of 'adl implies that God had willed the whole universe, nor created every thing, nor has He power over all. They believe that human actions, whether good or bad, are not created by God, that He does not will except what He has commanded as law, and that every thing else happens without His will.

These ideas have also been held by later Shī'ahs such as al-Mufīd, Abū ja'far al-Ṭūsī<sup>110</sup> and others. In fact Abū Ja'far has written a commentary on these lines, adding also the beliefs of the Imāmīyah Ithnā Asharīyah.<sup>111</sup> The Mu'tazilah, however, do not

<sup>110</sup> A number of Ithnā 'Asharī Shī'ahs have commentaries on the Qur'ān. Of them Ibn Taymīyah has mentioned two: al-Shaykh al-Mufīd Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Akbarī (d. 413/1022) and Abū ja'far Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1068) who is called *Shaykh al-Ṭā'ifah*. The commentary of al-Ṭūsī is entitled: *Al-Tibyān al-Jāmi' li 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, and has been published from Beirut and Najaf. Drawing upon al-Ṭūsī's commentary, al-Ṭabrisī, Abū 'Alī al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan (d. 538/1143) has written another important commentary called *Majma' l-Bayān li 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, which has been published from Iran in ten volumes. The earliest *tafsīr* of the Imāmīyah available is that attributed to the eleventh imām al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī (d. 260/874).

<sup>111</sup> Ithnā 'Ashrī Shī'ahs trace the line of *imāmah* in the family of 'Alī like this: 'Alī, al-Ḥusayn, Zayn al-'Ābidīn, Muḥammad al-Bāqar, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, Mūsā Kāzīm, Rida, Muḥammad al-Jawwād, 'Alī al-Hādī, al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī and finally his son Muḥammad who went into hiding and will be appearing as the promised and awaited Mahdī.

subscribe to the distinctive ideas of the Shi'ahs, nor do they deny the caliphate of Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān or 'Alī.

One of the principles in which the Mu'tazila believe in agreement with the Khawārij is that the threatened punishment in the Hereafter will necessarily be carried out. According to their opinion, God will not accept any intercession in favour of the perpetrators of big sins (*kabīrah*), nor will He deliver them from the Hell. This doctrine has been refuted by many sects such as the Murji'ah,<sup>112</sup> the Karrāmīyah,<sup>113</sup> the Kallābīyah<sup>114</sup> and their followers. But they have over acted in their criticism, and moved to the other extreme as we have explained elsewhere.<sup>115</sup>

What I want to say is that people like the Mu'tazilah first form some idea and then interpret the Qur'ān to suit their purpose. None of the Elders, the Companions or the leaders (*a'immaḥ*) of the *Ummah* are with them in what they believe or how they interpret the Qur'ān. Their interpretations of the Qur'ān can easily be shown to be wrong in two ways:

<sup>112</sup> For Murji'ah see note 108.

<sup>113</sup> Karrāmīyah are the followers of Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Karrām (d. 255/355). They conceive of God as a substance (*jawhar*) or a body (*jism*) without human members, of course, but placed on the Throne, located in space. Faith means for them a single utterance of the two *shahādah*, involving neither conviction nor work. Ibn Taymīyah has refuted this doctrine in his *Kitāb al-Imān* (Cairo, 1325 A.H. p.57f.) Their doctrines spread mainly in Khurāsān, and when Chāngiz Khan's forces overran the country they were exterminated.

<sup>114</sup> Kallābīyah are the followers of Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh b. Sa'īd b. Muḥammad b. Kallāb al-Qaṭṭān (d. Ca. 240/854). They were later absorbed in the Ash'arīyah. (Al-Maqdisī, *Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm*, Leiden 1885, p.37).

<sup>115</sup> Ibn Taymīyah has discussed this in detail in his *Kitāb al-Imān*. (*Majmū' Fatāwā Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymīyah*, Riyadh, Vol. VII).

by demonstrating that their views are erroneous, or by showing that their interpretations of the Qur'ān are unjustified. And this can be done either by refuting the arguments which they advance for their views or by defending the positions which they attack.

Some have a lucid and charming style of writing, and introduce their erroneous beliefs so cleverly that many of their readers fail to see them. The author of al-Kashshāf, for instance, has succeeded in making his ideas attractive to a great number of people who would hardly look for erroneous ideas in his commentary. In fact, I know some *tafsīr* writers and scholars who approvingly quote in their writings and speeches passages from their commentaries that contain ideas which follow from the principles they believe and are wrong, but they are not aware of them. Since their language is elegant their erroneous views have entered the Rāfiḍah Imāmīyah,<sup>116</sup> the philosophers,<sup>117</sup> the Qarāmatah<sup>118</sup> and others, and become much more destructive.

The philosophers, the Qarāmatah and the Rāfiḍah have carried things to their own extreme. They explain the Qur'ān in very queer and strange ways. The

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<sup>116</sup> Rāfiḍah is another term for the Shī'ahs, because they refuse (*rafḍ*) to accept the caliphate of Abū Bakr and 'Umar. The term Imāmīyah may refer both to *Ithnā 'Ashrīyah* and the *Ismā'īlīyah* sects, but usually it refers as here to the former. See also notes 111 and 24.

<sup>117</sup> Philosophers like Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (d.339/950), Ibn Sīna (d. 428/1036) and the writers of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā* have explained various Qur'ānic verses and interpreted many concepts of religion such as the attributes of God, the angels, Paradise and Hell, prophecy and revelation (*waḥy*) in the light of Greek philosophical ideas as they understood them. The Mu'tazilah have been influenced by Greek logic and philosophy, and have in turn influenced the philosophers.

<sup>118</sup> For the Qarāmatah see note 24.

Rāfiḍah for instance, believe that the verse "Perish (both) the hands of the Father of Flame"<sup>119</sup> refers to Abū Bakr and 'Umar; that the verse "If you were to associate (gods to Allāh) truly fruitless will be your work (in life)"<sup>120</sup> refers to the association of Abū Bakr and 'Umar with 'Alī in the *khilāfah*; that the word '*baqarah*' in the verse "God commands you to sacrifice a heifer (*baqarah*)"<sup>121</sup> means 'Ā'isha; that the command: "Fight the chief of unfaith"<sup>122</sup> is directed against Ṭalhah and Zubayr; that the verse "He has let the two bodies of flowing water meet together,"<sup>123</sup> refers to the meeting of 'Alī and Fātimah; that the verse, "Out of them come pearl and coral"<sup>124</sup> refers to the birth of al-Hasan and al-Husayn; that the '*imām mubīn*' in the verse "We have taken account of all things in a Clear Book (*imām mubīn*)"<sup>125</sup> means 'Alī; that in the verse "what are they disputing about? The Great News!"<sup>126</sup> the reference is to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib; and that in the verse "Your real friends are God, His Apostle, and the Faithful who establish regular prayers, regular charity (*zakāh*) and bow down humbly in worship,"<sup>127</sup> the Faithful means 'Alī. In support of it they quote the *ḥadīth* that 'Alī gave out his ring in charity while he was praying a *ḥadīth* which the scholars of *ḥadīth* unanimously declare fabricated.<sup>128</sup> They similarly believe that the verse, "They are the

<sup>119</sup> *al-Qur'ān*, 111 : 1.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 39 : 65.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 : 67.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 : 12.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 55 : 19.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 55 : 12.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 36 : 12.

<sup>126</sup> *al-Qur'ān*, 78 : 1-2.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 : 58.

<sup>128</sup> See Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir*, 2:71, al-Tabri, *Tafsir*, 10:425.

ones on whom descend blessings from God and mercy" <sup>129</sup> refers to 'Alī, and was revealed when Hamzah was killed.

Very similar to this in some respect is what some commentators have said regarding the verse, "Those who show patience; firmness and self-control (*sābirīn*), who are true in word and deed (*sādiqīn*); who worship devoutly (*qānitīn*); who spend in the way of God (*munfiqīn*); who pray for forgiveness (*mustaghfirīn*) in the early hours of morning,"<sup>130</sup> that the *sābirīn* means the Prophet, the *sādiqīn* means Abū Bakr, *qānitīn* means 'Umar, *munfiqīn* means 'Uthmān and *mustaghfirīn* means 'Alī. Similar, too, is what they have said regarding the verse "Muhammad is the Apostle of God, and those who are with him are strong against unbelievers, but compassionate among themselves; you shall see them bow and prostrate themselves (in prayer)"<sup>131</sup> that 'those who are with him' refers to Abū Bakr; the 'strong against unbelievers' refers to 'Umar; the 'compassionate among themselves' refers to 'Uthmān; and 'they bow and prostrate themselves' refers to 'Alī. Even more fantastic is what they have mentioned with regard to the verse: "By the Fig and the Olive, and the Mount of Sinai, and this city of Security"<sup>132</sup> that the Fig refers to Abū Bakr, the olive to 'Umar, the Mount of Sinai to 'Uthmān, and the City of Security to 'Alī.

Rubbish comments like these ascribe meanings to words which do not exist. The above-mentioned words, for instance, do not mean the personalities

<sup>129</sup> *al-Qur'ān*; 2 : 157.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 : 17.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 48 : 29.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 95 : 1-3.

whom they suggest. In fact, the verse: "Those who are with him are strong against the unbelievers, but compassionate among themselves, and you shall see them how and prostrate themselves (in prayer)" refers to all those who are with the Prophet and describes their lives. It is an instance of what the grammarians call successive predication, wherein all the adjectives qualify the same object, namely the companions of the Prophet, rather than one or the other of them. On the other hand, these comments limit the application of a general statement to a particular person. It is not, for instance, right to say that the Faithful in the verse: "Your real friends are God, His Apostle and the Faithful," refers only to 'Alī; or that the last part of the verse: "He who brings the truth and he who supports it"<sup>133</sup> refers to Abū Bakr alone; or that the verse: "Those who spent (in the way of God) and fought before the Victory are not equal (but higher than those) who did so later"<sup>134</sup>, also refers to Abū Bakr.

The commentaries of Ibn 'Afiyah<sup>135</sup> and other like him are more faithful to the views of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa l-Jamā'h*, and free from misconceived innovations (*bid'ah*) as compared to the Commentary of al-Zamakhsharī. However, if ibn 'Afiyah had limited himself to quoting from the comments of the Elders on the Qur'ān as it has come down from them, it would have been better. But unfortunately, he quotes only a few things from the Commentary of Muhammad ibn

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 39 : 33.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 57 : 10.

<sup>135</sup> Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ḥaqq b. Ghālib . 'Afi'ah (481/1088 – 546/1151), a man of letters, poet, grammarian, *faqīh*, and Qāḍī from Granada (Spain) wrote a commentary on the Qur'ān entitled : *al-Muḥarrar al-Wajīz fī Tafsīr al-Kitāb al-'Azīz* in ten volumes, which is still unpublished.

Jarīr al-Ṭabarī<sup>136</sup> which is one of the most outstanding commentaries based on the traditions of the Elders, and then leaves, without giving any indication, the rest of what Ibn Jarīr has reported from the Elders, and goes on to present what he thinks is the view of some 'profound scholars', by which term he means the theologians who have developed ideas on lines very much similar to those of the Mu'tazilah, even though they are much closer to the *Ahl al-Sunnah* than the latter. It would not be unfair to Ibn 'Aḏīyah if we say that his Commentary is one of those which defend a particular school of thought. For, if we have the *tafsīr* of a verse by the Companions, the Successors and the *a'immaḥ*, and someone comes out with a different *tafsīr* because he has some particular views not held by the Companions or their righteous Successors, he is not different from the Mu'tazilah or those who indulge in wrong innovations (*bid'ah*). In short, he who diverges from the views of the Companions and the Successors or their explanations is wrong; nay, he is a mistaken innovator, even though he is a *mujahid* (trying honestly to reach the truth) and will hopefully be forgiven by God.

We have discussed various methods of knowledge and ways of knowing the truth. We know that the Companions, the Successors and their Followers studied the Qur'ān very carefully, and that they knew the meaning and the interpretation of its verses more than any one else, just as they knew best the truth which God revealed to His Prophet. Hence, those who deviate from their views, and explain the Qur'ān on different lines are wrong both in the ideas they expound and the arguments they advance. To be sure,

<sup>136</sup> For Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī see note 103.

all those who oppose them do have some arguments to offer, based either upon reason or tradition; but as we have explained elsewhere their ideas have no value.

Here, we are only concerned with the reasons for the difference in *tafsīr*. We want to underline the fact that one very important reason for the difference is the innovative and erroneous ideas which lead their believers to take passages out of their context, explain the words of God and the Prophet in a sense not intended by them, and interpret them contrary to what they mean. One cannot find this out unless one knows the views which they oppose and knows that what they oppose is true. One has to know that the *tafsīr* of the Elders is different from their *tafsīr*, and their *tafsīr* is new and unjustified. One has also to know the errors of their *tafsīr* in detail with the help of the signs that God has established for knowing the true from the untrue. Some of those who have written commentaries on *ḥadīth* in later times have done something very similar to what these people have done in the explanation and interpretation of the Qur'ān.

The writers whose ideas are right, but whose effort to deduce them from the Qur'ān is wrong include a number of sufis, public preachers, jurists, and others. In commenting on the Qur'ān, they often expound ideas which taken by themselves are right, but the verses of the Qur'ān from which they try to deduce them do not imply them. A considerable part of what Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī<sup>137</sup> has written in his

<sup>137</sup> Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad b. Al-Ḥusayn b. Mūsā al-Sulamī (330/941 – 412/1021), the leader of the sufis in Khurāsān and the author of the *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyah*, has written a commentary on the Qur'ān entitled: *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr*. This is not, however, a *tafsīr* in the common sense of the term; it is rather a collection of what sufis  
...(contd on next page)



*Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr*, for instance, is of this sort. To be sure, if the ideas were also wrong, their *tafsīr* would have fallen into the first category wherein both the ideas and the arguments are equally wrong.

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like Ibn 'Atā Allāh al-Iskandari, al-Junayd, Fuḍayl b. 'Iyād and Sahl b. 'Abd Allāh al-Tustarī have said regarding different verses of the Qur'ān.

Among the other sufi commentaries of the Qur'ān mention may be made of the *tafsīr* of Sahl b. 'Abd Allāh al-Tustarī (d. 273/886), Abū Muḥammad Rūzbahān al-Baqlī (d. 666/1268) and 'Alā al-Dawlah al-Simnānī (d. 736/1335). The *tafsīr* which has been attributed to Ibn al-'Arabī is not his work; it was written by 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshī (d. 730/1330).

## Chapter Five

# HOW TO DO TAFSĪR

If you ask what is the best way to do *tafsīr*, the answer is that the best way is to explain the Qur'ān through the Qur'ān. For, what the Qur'ān alludes to at one place is explained at the other, and what it says in brief on one occasion is elaborated upon at the other. But if this does not help you, you should turn to the Sunnah, because the Sunnah explains and elucidates the Qur'ān. Imām 'Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad bin Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī<sup>138</sup> has said: "All that the Prophet, peace be upon him, has said is what he has derived from the Qur'ān". God has said: "We have sent down to you the Book in truth that you may judge between men, as God guides you; so don't be an advocate for those who betray their trust"<sup>139</sup>, and : "We have sent down to you the message that you may explain clearly to people what has been sent to them, and that they may think over it"<sup>140</sup>, and : "We sent down the Book to you for the express purpose that you should make clear to them those things in which they differ, and that it should be a guide and a mercy to those who believe."<sup>141</sup> This is why the Prophet said: "Know that I have been given the Qur'ān and something like it"<sup>142</sup>, namely the sunnah. In fact, the Sunnah, too, has been

<sup>138</sup> For Imām Shāfi'ī see note 20.

<sup>139</sup> *al-Qur'ān*, 4 : 105.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 : 44.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 : 64.

<sup>142</sup> Aḥmad, *Musnad*, Vol. IV 131 ; Abū Dawūd, *Sunan*; sunnah, 5.

given to him through *wahy* as the Qur'ān, except that it has not been recited to him as the Qur'ān. Imām al-Shāfi'ī and other doctors have advanced a number of arguments in support of this point: but we cannot produce them here.<sup>143</sup>

In order to understand the Qur'ān, you should first look to the Qur'ān itself. If that does not help, then turn to the Sunnah. The Prophet sent Mu'ādh to Yaman and asked him: "How will you judge the cases (that come to you)?" He replied: "I will judge according to the Book of God", "But if you do not get any thing there, what will you do?", the Prophet asked. He said: "I will refer to the Sunnah of the Prophet." "But if you do not get even there, what will you do?", the Prophet asked again. He replied: "I will exercise my judgement." Hearing this the Prophet patted Mu'ādh on the shoulder and said: "Praise be to God who has guided the messenger of His Messenger to what pleases His Messenger." This *ḥadīth* has been reported in the Musnad and Sunan collections<sup>144</sup> of *ḥadīth* with a good *isnād*.

When you do not get any help from the Qur'ān or the Sunnah, turn to the words of the Companions. For they know the Qur'ān better: they have witnessed its revelation, and passed through the situations in which it was revealed; and know it and understand it fully. This is particularly true of their scholars and leaders, such as the four righteous caliphs and 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd. Imām Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr-Ṭabarī

<sup>143</sup> For discussion see al-Shāfi'ī, *al-Risālah*, ed. Aḥmad Shākir (al-Ḥalabī, 1358 A. H.), p. 73 ff.

<sup>144</sup> Aḥmad, *Musnad*, V : 230, 236, 242 ; Al-Dārimī, *Sunan muqaddamah*, 30 ; al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan ahkām*, 3; Abū Dawūd *Sunan*, Adhīyah, 11.

reports through Abū Kurayb, Jābir ibn Nūh, al-A'mash, Abu l-Duḥā and masrūq that 'Abdullāh Ibn Mas'ūd said: "By the One besides Whom there is no God, there is no verse in the Qur'ān about which I do not know in whose case and at what place was it revealed. If I were that anyone knew the Qur'ān more than me, and I could reach him, I would have certainly gone to see him."<sup>145</sup> Al-A'mash has also reported through Abū Wā'il that Ibn Mas'ūd said: "When any one of us learned ten verses of the Qur'ān, he did not proceed further unless he had known what they meant and what action they did demand."

Another great scholar and savant is 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās, the nephew of the Prophet and the Commentator of the Qur'ān. He attained that stature in virtue of the Prophet's prayer: "O God! Give him knowledge of Islam and teach him the meaning of the Qur'ān."<sup>146</sup> Ibn Jarīr has reported through Muḥammad ibn Bashshār, Wakī', Sufyān al-A'mash and Muslim that 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd said: "What a good interpreter of the Qur'ān Ibn 'Abbās is !" Ibn Jarīr has also reported this tradition through Yahyā ibn Dawūd, Ishāq al-Azraq, Sufyān, al-A'mash, Muslim ibn Sabīḥ Abī l-Duḥā and al-Masrūq with slightly different words: "What a good interpreter Ibn 'abbās is of the Qur'ān!" He has also reported the same words through Bundār, Ja'far ibn 'Awn and al-A'mash. These words are, therefore, the actual words of Ibn Mas'ūd which he said about Ibn 'Abbās. Ibn Mas'ūd died, most probably, in 33 A.H. Ibn 'Abbās lived for thirty six

<sup>145</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, *Jāmi' al-Usūl fī Aḥādīth al-Rasūl*, 1392/1972, Vol. IX, p.48.

<sup>146</sup> Aḥmad, *Musnad*, Vol. 1 : 266, 314, 328, 335. See also *Fath al-Bari*, 7:80

years after him, and added a lot to the treasury of Islamic knowledge.

Al-A'mash quotes from Abū Wā'il that when Ibn 'Abbās was appointed leader of the *Hajj* by 'Alī, he delivered a sermon and read from the surah *al-Baqarah* or surah *al-Nūr*, according to another report, and explained it in such a way that had the Romans, the Turks and the Dalamites heard it they would have embraced Islam. This is the reason why most of what Ismā'il ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān, the elder Suddī<sup>147</sup> has written in *tafsīr* consists of the explanations of these two scholars: Ibn Mas'ūd and Ibn 'Abbās.

## THE ISRAELITE TRADITIONS

Suddī has also at times noted what the Companions have narrated from the traditions of the People of the Book. The Prophet permitted it in these words: "Transmit to other what you hear from me, even though it is only a verse; and there is no harm in quoting from Banī Isrā'īl. But remember, one who wrongly ascribes something to me will have his seat in the Hell."<sup>148</sup> Bukhārī has reported this *ḥadīth* through 'Abdullāh ibn 'Amr. At the battle of Yarmūk,<sup>149</sup> 'Abdullāh found two loads of books of the People of

<sup>147</sup> Ismā'il b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Suddī, the elder (d. 127/744) is a reliable narrator of traditions. But Muḥammad b. Marwān, the younger al-Suddī is unreliable.

<sup>148</sup> Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 'ilm : 38; janāiz : 33; anbiyā : 50; adab : 109. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, zuhd : 72 ; Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, 'ilm : 4; al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, fitan : 40; 'ilm, 8, 13; tafsīr : 11 ; manāqib : 19 ; Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, muqaddamah : 25, 46; Aḥmad, *Musnad*, Vol. I : 70, 78. Al-Tirmidhī has rated the *ḥadīth* as *hasan*, *sahih*. The second part of the *ḥadīth* is almost *mutawatir* Fath al-Bari, 1:161-165.

<sup>149</sup> The decisive battle of Yarmūk at which the Romans were crushed and Heraclius fled to Constantinople happened in the year 13 A.H. or 634 A.D.

the Book, and in view of the permission given in this *ḥadīth* he began narrating from them.

Israelite traditions, however, are not to be believed; they can only be used as supporting evidence. For, there are three kinds of them: One which we can regard as true if they are supported by our traditions; the second which we can regard as false if they are contradicted by our traditions; and the third which fall neither in this category nor in that, because our sources are silent about them. We shall neither believe them nor disbelieve them. They may be quoted as the *ḥadīth* permits; but let us note that most of them have no value so far as religious matters are concerned.

The scholars of the People of the Book have themselves differed considerably in these matters; as a result we have differences of opinion among the commentators of the Qur'ān. As examples we can cite what they have said regarding the names of the People of the Cave, their number, and the colour of their dog; or regarding the Rod of Moses and the wood it was made of; the names of the birds which God raised to life for the sake of Abraham; the part of the cow with which Moses hit the man who was murdered;<sup>150</sup> and no good would come to people, here or hereafter, if they were defined.

However, there is nothing against reporting the differences of the People of the Book in these matters. In fact, God has done that when He has said: "Some say they were three, the dog being the fourth; others say they were five, the dog being the sixth, doubtfully guessing at the unknown, (yet others) say they were

<sup>150</sup> See notes, 58, 59, 60, 61.

seven, the dog being the eighth. Say: 'My Lord knows best their number'; it is only a few who really know them. Enter not, therefore, into controversies concerning them, except on a matter that is clear, nor consult any of them about the Sleepers."<sup>151</sup> This verse is, in fact, a lesson in manners; it tells what one should do in such matters. For God has mentioned three of their opinions, condemned the first two, and abstained from saying anything regarding the third. This indicates that the last opinion is right; for, if it were wrong God would have contradicted it as He has contradicted the other two. He has then underlined that the knowledge of the numbers of the Sleepers is of little significance. Hence, in such matters one should say: "My Lord knows best their number."<sup>152</sup> For no one can know that except those whom God would like to inform. That is why He has instructed: "Enter not, therefore, into controversies concerning them, except in a matter that is clear", that is to say, do not trouble yourself in matters that are useless, nor ask any one concerning them; for they know nothing about them except mere guesswork.

The best that we can do in controversial matters is to cite all the different views, tell which is right and which is wrong, and point out what little good one can have from a discussion, so that a controversy over an insignificant issue may not prolong and divert the attention from what is really important.

One who mentions a controversial issue, but does not cite all the different opinions, commits a mistake; for, it is possible that the view which he has left out is the right view. Similarly, one who cites all different

<sup>151</sup> *al-Qur'ān*, 18 : 23.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 : 23.

views, but does not say which view is correct also commits a mistake. For, if he approves a wrong view knowingly, he tells a lie; and if he does that in ignorance he is wrong. Similarly, if one mentions different views over a small issue, or cites a number of views which differ only in words and can boil down to one or two views, he has unnecessarily paraded them and wasted time. He is like the one who puts on one dress after the other, none of which is his own.<sup>153</sup> May God show us the truth!

## THE TAFSĪR OF THE SUCCESSORS

When one does not find the *tafsīr* of the Qur'ān from the Qur'ān, or the Sunnah, or the words of the Companions, many scholars (*a'immaḥ*) turn to the words of the Successors (*al-Tābi'in*) such as Mujāhid Ibn Jubayr,<sup>154</sup> because he is wonderful in *tafsīr*. Muhammad ibn Ishāq reports through Abbān ibn Sālih that Mujāhid said: "I have read the Qur'ān with Ibn 'Abbās three times from the beginning to the end, pausing at every verse and questioning him about it." Al-Tirmidhī has reported through al-Ḥusayn ibn Mahdī al-Baṣrī, 'Abd al-Razzāq and Ammar that Qatādah<sup>155</sup> said: "There is hardly a verse of the Qur'ān about which I have not heard something." He has also reported through Ibn Abī'Umar, Sulaymān ibn 'Uyaynah and al-A'mash that Mujāhid said: "If I had read the Qur'ān with Ibn Mas'ūd I would not have asked Ibn 'Abbās about many parts of the Qur'ān as I

<sup>153</sup> This is a part of the *ḥadīth* recorded by Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, libās, 127; Abū Dawūd, *Sunan*, adab, 83; *Aḥmad*, *Musnad*, Vol. VI : 90, 167, 345, 346, 353.

<sup>154</sup> For Mujāhid see note 17.

<sup>155</sup> For Qatādah see note 76.



did." Ibn Jarīr reports from Abū Kurayb through Ṭalaq ibn Ghannām, 'Uthmān al-Makkī and Ibn Abī Mulaykah that he saw Mujāhid questioning about the verses of the Qur'ān with notebooks in his hand while Ibn 'Abbās dictated to him. Mujāhid went through the whole Qur'ān in this way. This is why Sufyān al-Thawrī has said: "If you get the *tafsīr* of Mujāhid that is enough."

Besides Mujāhid you can refer to Sa'id ibn Jubayr, 'Ikramah, the client (*mawlā*) of Ibn 'Abbās, 'Atā ibn Abī Ribāh, al-Ḥasan al-Basrī, Masrūq ibn al-Ajda', Sa'id ibn al-Musayyib, Abu l-'Āliyah, al-Rubay' ibn Anas, Qatādah, al-Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Muzāhim,<sup>156</sup> and other Successors, or their followers, even those who came after them. If you quote them in connection with a verse, you may find them explaining it in different words; one who is not aware of them, would consider it to be contradictory, and report as such. But this is not the case. For some of them in their explanation of a thing refer to what it implies, or what category it belongs to; while others refer to the thing itself. But all of them mean the same thing in most cases; this is not difficult for an intelligent man to find out. May God show us the truth!

<sup>156</sup> For Sa'id ibn Jubayr, 'Ikramah, 'Atā b. Abī Ribāh see note 69; for Sa'id b. al-Musayyib note 75; and for Qatādah note 76.

Abū Sa'id al-Ḥasan al-Basrī (d. 110/728), an outstanding scholar, a narrator of *ḥadīth*, a *muḥassir*, *faqīh* preacher and ascetic was the *Shaykh* of the Basarites of his time.

Abū 'Ā'ishah Masrūq b. al-Ajda' (d. 63/683) has been said to be the most knowledgeable student of 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd at Kufah.

Abu l-'Āliyah Rafī' b. Muzāhim al-Balkhī (d. 105/723) learned *tafsīr* from Sa'id ibn Jubayr, and wrote a book on the subject. (al-Zarkalī, *al-A'lām*, III: 310).

Al-Rubay' b. Anas, another scholar of the Qur'ān died in 139/756.

Shu'bah<sup>157</sup> and others have said: "The words of the Successors (*al-Tābi'in*) wield no authority in matters of practical rules (*furū'*); so how can they have an authority in *tafsīr*!" What he means to say is that the words of a Successor have no authority over another Successor who differs from him; and this is true. But when they agree on one thing it undoubtedly wields an authority. However, if they differ, the views of one will have no authority over others among them, nor over those who come after them. In such cases, one should turn to the language of the Qur'ān or the Sunnah, or the Arabic literature in general, or the words of the Companions on that matter.

<sup>157</sup> Shu'bah b. Al-Ḥajjāj b. Al-Warad al-Antākī (82/701 – 160/776), one of the leading scholars of *ḥadīth* at Basrah, wrote a book, *at-Gharā'ib* in *ḥadīth*. (al-Zarkalī, *al-A'lām*, III : 242).

## Chapter Six

# TAFSIR ON THE BASIS OF REASON

*Tafsīr* of the Qur'ān based merely on reason is forbidden (*ḥarām*). Mu'ammal has reported through Sufyān, 'Abd al-A'lā, Sa'īd ibn Jubayr and Ibn 'Abbās that the Prophet said: "Whoever talks about the Qur'ān without proper knowledge makes room for him in the Hell."<sup>158</sup> Wakī' has reported exactly the same words of the Prophet through Sufyān, 'Abd al-A'lā, al-Tha'labī, Sa'īd Ibn 'Abbās. Al-Tirmidhī has reported through 'Abd ibn Ḥumayd, Ḥabbān ibn Hilāl, Ḥazm al-Quta'ī's brother Suhayl, Abū 'Imrān al-Jūnī and Jundab that the Prophet said: "Whoever talks about the Qur'ān merely on the basis of his reason is a sinner, even though what he says is right."<sup>159</sup> Al-tirmidhī thinks that this *ḥadīth* is rare (*gharīb*); other scholars of *ḥadīth* are not sure about the veracity of Sahl ibn Abī Ḥazm, who is one of its transmitters. However, a number of scholars from the Companions and others have been reported to have condemned in the same vein the effort to explain the Qur'ān without knowledge.

If Mujāhid, Qatādah and other scholars like them have explained the Qur'ān we expect that they would

<sup>158</sup> Aḥmad, *Musnad*, Vol. I : 233, 269, 323, 327; al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, tafsīr, fi tarjumah.

<sup>159</sup> al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, tafsīr : 1; Abū Dawūd, *Sunan*, 'ilm : 5. Shaykh al-Bānī has included this *ḥadīth* among the weak (*da'īf*) *aḥdīth*, al-Jamī' al-Saghir, 5730. But Shaykh Ahmad Shakir has discussed the issue at length and rated the *ḥadīth* as authentic (see al-Sunan al-Tirmidhi 8:146).

not have said anything about the Qur'ān or commented on its verses without proper knowledge, simply on the basis of their reason. This is supported by various reports about them which say that they never said anything without knowledge just from their mind. Hence, if one talks about the Qur'ān on the basis of his reason, he talks about what he does not know, and violates the rule he has been asked to follow. Consequently, even if what he says is right he sins, because he has not followed the command. He is like the one who judges people without knowledge: he shall go to Hell even though his judgement is right. His crime is, to be sure, smaller than the crime of the one whose judgement is also wrong. God, however, knows better. This is also the reason why God has called the slanderers liars: "If they do not come up with witness, they are liars in the sight of God."<sup>160</sup> The slanderer is a liar, even though he assails one who has committed adultery; for he speaks about someone whom he is not entitled to speak about, and does something about which he does not have the required knowledge. However, true knowledge is with God.

This is why a number of the Elders have refrained from talking about the Qur'ān when they do not have proper knowledge. Shū'bah has reported through Sulaymān, 'Abdullāh ibn Murrah, and Abū Ma'mar that Abū Bakr<sup>161</sup> said: "What earth will hold me, and what heaven will protect me if I say something

<sup>160</sup> *al-Qur'ān*, 24 : 13.

<sup>161</sup> Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (573 – 13/634), the closest friend of the Prophet before and after Islam, the greatest of all the Companions and the first Caliph, suppressed the apostacy of the Arabs after the Prophet's death, re-established the rule of Islam over Arabia, and at the suggestion of 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb got the Qur'ān collected and written in one volume (*Mushaf*).

concerning the Book of God which I do not know.” Abū ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim ibn Salām reports through Maḥammad ibn Yazīd, al-‘Awwām ibn Hawshab and Ibrahīm al-Taymī that when he was asked about the verse: *‘wa fākihat-an wa abb-ā’*<sup>162</sup> he said: “What heaven will protect me and what earth will hold me, if I say about the Qur’ān which I do not know.” The chain of this tradition is, however, incomplete. Abū ‘Ubayd has reported through Yazīd, Husayn and Anas that ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb<sup>163</sup> once read the verse: *‘wa fākihat-an wa abb-ā’* on the pulpit and said that he knew the *fākihat* (fruits), but what was *abb*? Then he paused for a while and said: “This is an unnecessary question, O ‘Umar!” ‘Abd ibn Ḥumayd has reported through Sulaymān ibn Ḥarb, Ḥammād ibn Zayd, Thābit and Anas that they were once with ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb when he was wearing a shirt that had four patches on it. He read the verse: *‘Wa fākhihat-an wa abb-ā’* and said: “What is *abb*?” Then he paused for a while and said: “This question is unnecessary. What’s the harm if I do not know it.” What we understand from these reports is that these great Companions wanted to know what exactly was the *abb*. For, every one knows that *abb* is some kind of herb that grows on the earth, because God has said: “And we produced thereon corn and grapes, and nutritious plants, and

<sup>162</sup> al-Qur’ān, 80 : 31.

<sup>163</sup> ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (583 – 24/644), the greatest Companion of the Prophet next only to Abu Bakr, the second Caliph, and a great conquerer, ruler and statesman, crushed the powers of the Persian and Roman empires, extended the rule of Islam from Iran to Egypt, and shaped the Islamic government creating the new institutions it required. He is known for his profound insights into the Qur’ān, *ḥadīth* and *fiqh*.

olives and dates, and enclosed gardens with lofty trees, and fruits (*fākihāt-an*) and herbs (*abbā*)."<sup>164</sup>

Ibn Jarīr has reported through Ya'qūb ibn Ibrāhīm, Ibn 'Ulayyah and Ayyūb that Ibn Abī Mulaykah said: "Ibn 'Abbās was asked about a verse, but he did not say anything. But if you were asked about it you would have certainly said something." The isnād of this tradition is sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*). Abū 'Ubayd reports through Ismā'īl ibn Ibrāhīm, Ayyūb and Ibn Abī Mulaykah that a person asked Ibn 'Abbās about, 'the day which is as long as five thousand years'<sup>165</sup> and insisted upon knowing his view. Ibn 'abbās said: "There are two days which God has mentioned in His Book,<sup>166</sup> and He knows them better." This means that he declined to say anything regarding the Qur'ān that he did not know.

Ibn Jarīr has also reported through Ya'qūb ibn Ibrāhīm Ibn 'Ulayyah, Maḥdī ibn Maymūn, and al-Walīd ibn Muslim that Ṭalaq ibn Ḥabīb went to Jundab ibn 'Abdullāh<sup>167</sup> and asked about a verse of the Qur'ān. He said: "Go away from me, if you are a Muslim", and according to another version: "Never come to me." Mālik has reported through Yaḥyā ibn Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyib<sup>168</sup> would speak about those verses only which he knew. Shu'bah has reported through 'Amr ibn Murrah that someone asked Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyib about a verse of the Qur'ān. He said: "don't ask me about the Qur'ān; ask one who thinks

<sup>164</sup> *al-Qur'ān*, 27-31.

<sup>165</sup> This is a reference to the Qur'ānic verse, 70: 4.

<sup>166</sup> The other day which is referred here has been mentioned in the verse 22: 47 to be as long as thousand years.

<sup>167</sup> Jundub ibn 'Abd Allah b. Sufyān al-Bajlī is one of Companions of the Prophet whose association with him was short. He died between 60 and 70 A.H. (Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb* Vol. 2. P. 118).

<sup>168</sup> For Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyib see note 75.

that nothing of the Qur'ān is hidden from him." He was referring to 'Ikramah.<sup>169</sup> Ibn Shawdhab has reported that Yazīd ibn Abī Yaz id said: "When we asked Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyib about the lawful (*ḥalāl*) and unlawful (*ḥarām*) he was happy to reply; to be sure, he was the most learned person. But when we asked him about the *tafsīr* of a verse he would keep silent, as if he did not hear." Ibn Jarīr has reported through Aḥmad ibn 'Abdat al-Ḍabī and Ḥammād ibn Zayd that 'Ubaydullāh ibn 'Umar said: "I have seen many learned men of Madīnah such as Sālim ibn 'Abdullāh, al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad, Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyib and Nāfi'<sup>170</sup>, who were very diffident about doing *tafsīr*. Abū 'Ubayd has reported through 'Abdullāh ibn Sāliḥ and al-Layth that Hishām ibn 'Urwah<sup>171</sup> said that he never heard his father interpreting the Qur'ān. Ayyūb Ibn 'Awn and Hishām al-Dastawā'ī have reported that Muḥammad ibn Sīrīn said: "I asked 'Ubaydat al-Salmānī<sup>172</sup> about a verse of the Qur'ān. He replied: "Those who knew the circumstances in which the Qur'ānic verses were revealed have passed away. So fear God, and mind your way." Abū 'Ubayd has reported through Mu'adh, Ibn 'Awn and 'Ubaydullāh ibn Muslim ibn Yasār<sup>173</sup>

<sup>169</sup> For 'Ikramah see note 69.

<sup>170</sup> Sālim ibn 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar al-Fārūq (d. 106/724) was one of the seven distinguished jurists among the Successors of Madīnah. For al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad b. Abū Bakr al-Siddīq see note 75. Abū 'Abd Allāh Nāfi' (d. 117/735), the client of 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar, a scholar of *ḥadīth* and *fiqh*, was sent by the Caliph Umar b. 'Abd al-Azīz to Egypt to teach *ḥadīth*.

<sup>171</sup> For 'Urwah b. Zubayr see note 65. His son Hishām ibn 'Urwah died in 146/763.

<sup>172</sup> For 'Ubaydah al-Salmānī see note 75.

<sup>173</sup> Muslim b. Yasār al-Baṣrī (d. 100/728), originally from Makkah, settled at Basra and distinguished himself as a scholar of *ḥadīth* and *fiqh*. (al-Zarkalī, *al-A'lām*, VIII : 121).

that his father said: "Before you report from God, pause for a while and look at the context." Hāshim has reported through Mughīrah that Ibrāhīm<sup>174</sup> said: "Our colleagues used to avoid *tafsīr*, and shivered at it." Shu'bah has reported through 'Abdullāh ibn Abī l-Safar that al-Sha'bī<sup>175</sup> said: "By God, I have enquired about every verse of the Qur'ān. But you know, it means to report from God." Abū 'Ubayd has reported through 'Umar ibn Abī Zā'idah and al-Sha'bī that Masrūq<sup>176</sup> said: "Beware of *tafsīr*! It is, in fact, reporting from God."

These and other authentic traditions from the leaders of the *salaf* show that they abstained from the *tafsīr* of those verses about which they did not have knowledge. However, those who did *tafsīr* because they knew the verses, their language as well as their religious and legal implications, had nothing to worry about. That is why their comments on the Qur'ān have come down to us. And this does not conflict with the attitude we have described above. They discussed things they knew, and abstained from discussing what they did not know. This is true of every one. One must not speak about what one does not know. But on the other hand, one must speak on what one knows when one is asked about it. For, that, too, is a duty, as God has said: "You must clearly explain it (i.e. the Qur'ān) to the people and never hide it"<sup>177</sup>, or as the Prophet has said in a *ḥadīth* reported through various channels:

<sup>174</sup> Ibrāhīm b. Yazīd b. Qays al-Aswad al-Nakh'ī (46/666 – 96/815) was one of the most eminent Successors. He distinguished himself as a *faqīh*; in fact, he had developed a *fiqh* of his own, and was known as the *faqīh al-Iraq*. He was based at Kufah.

<sup>175</sup> For al-Sha'bī see note 65.

<sup>176</sup> For Masrūq see note 156.

<sup>177</sup> *al-Qur'ān*, 3 : 187.



"One who hides what he knows when he is asked about it, shall have a bridle of fire on his mouth at the Day of Judgment."<sup>178</sup> Ibn Jarīr has reported through Muḥammad ibn Bashshār, Mu'ammal, Sufyān and Abū l-Zanad that Ibn 'Abbās said: "*Tafsīr* is of four kinds: One which the Arabs can know from the language; second, which no one can be excused for not knowing; third, which only the scholars know; and fourth, which God alone knows."



<sup>178</sup> Aḥmad, *Musnad*, Vol. II : 263, 305, 344, 353, 495 ; al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, 'ilm : 3; Abū Dawūd, *Sunan*, 'ilm, 9; Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, muqaddamah, 24.